Spider Dreams:

Ritual and Performance in

Apulian Tarantismo and Tarantella

by

Laura Biagi

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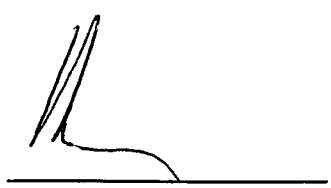

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Mario and Giuliana Biagi, my grandmother Emma Bova, for my sister Stefania Biagi in Rossi, my brother-in-law Riccardo Rossi, and my niece Matilde Rossi. Thank you for your support, trust, and curiosity. May our work and the work of our children heal our past, present, and future.

For my partner Truth (Michael Wright), whose presence in my everyday life throughout the completion of this thesis has nourished my courage to change. May this dissertation inspire you in your courageous journey.

For my teachers, students, and friends around the world. Your example, support, and constructive criticism are part of who I am.

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this dissertation is to look at the relationship between ritual, performance, and social change in Southern Italy since the end of World War II. The focus is on Apulian *tarantismo*, a ritual of healing involving music and dance. Pivotal, in the system of tarantismo, is the figure of the *taranta*, a local spider, whose bite "possesses" the bitten with acoustic qualities that match its anthropomorphic characteristics. The healing for this bite happens during the *pizzica tarantata* ritual, in which professional musicians diagnose the vibration of the spider venom by performing a repertory of *tarantella* tunes. When the right tune is found, the person bitten begins to dance a cathartic tarantella dance.

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Since the 1950s the ritual has slowly changed, leading some scholars to say that it has disappeared. I look at the ritual changes and at the ritual revival that, since the 1990s, have enthralled musicians, dancers, poets, directors, and filmmakers in Italy and in the United States. I situate the revival of tarantella and tarantismo at the tail end of the larger Italian folk revival of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Key concepts such as "originality," "tradition," and "identity" as they relate to "local" music in a "global" market are discussed in the context of Salentine folklore.

The dissertation research includes interviews and notes gathered during my fieldwork in Salento in the summer of 2002, analysis of staged performances of tarantella music and dance, and analysis of the *tarantata* ritual through the study of descriptions on

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books and articles, as well as the study of historical video and sound recordings.

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Introduction

Inside the southern Italian region of Apulia, the cultural region of Salento stretches to the extreme southern and eastern point of "the Italian boot." In Salento, a popular belief asserts that when the *taranta* (a local tarantula) bites, the animal has the capacity to possess the body of the person/animal bitten. The name taranta is used in this region more generally to indicate all venomous animals (such as scorpions, snakes, or a rabid dog) that not only bite, but that enchant with their gaze, that can speak, and that can appear in dreams. When taranta is referred to as a spider, its entity is mostly female.[1] A woman bitten was

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called *tarantata* (*-e* plural) and a man *tarantato* (*-i* plural).[2]

After a preliminary study on tarantismo, in which I read the main anthropological works on the topic, the first general impression I received was that this ritual had "disappeared," that it was over, and that it could no longer be witnessed. A series of questions emerged from this apparent difficulty: would my research need to limit itself to second hand material and become a work of historical research? Can a ritual completely disappear? If so, perhaps due to economic, social and political changes, what other rituals emerge in its place? What seemed to be my bigger obstacle, the "disappearance" of the ritual, became a thread of my dissertation. At the base of disappearance are change and transformation rather than elimination, and ritual, in general, involves transformation, even when it is

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performed to maintain order (social, political, or cosmological). Ritual creates alternative time, space and personalities. It transforms reality and allows members of the community to alter their everyday life selves.

This dissertation is a study of Southern Italian folklore. In Italian, the word folklore is translated with *tradizioni popolari* (popular traditions, traditions of the people). Folk music and dance are translated with *musica popolare e danza popolare.* What I mean by the word *folklore* and the adjective *folk* in this dissertation is, like in Italian, work by the people for the people, created and used to support everyday life needs (i.e. ritual music and dance, work songs, emigration songs, love songs, etc.). The word *folclore*, according to the Zingarelli dictionary of Italian Language (2001) was borrowed from the English

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and adopted by the Italian dictionary in 1884. This word was often used derogatorily by members of the upper classes to describe the aesthetics of lower classes, particularly their music, dance, costume, religioun, and ritual practices.

The geographical focus of my research is on Salento, a cultural area of Apulia in Southern Italy where the ritual of tarantismo was practiced until the early 1980s. The map on page 5 shows Italy divided into northern, central, and southern regions. In the map, the region of Apulia is the "heal" of the "Italian boot," a land of passage, a peninsula in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, sometimes called by the local population a "thorn in the European side." Salento is a cultural region inside Apulia. On the map, Salento is highlighted inside the square.

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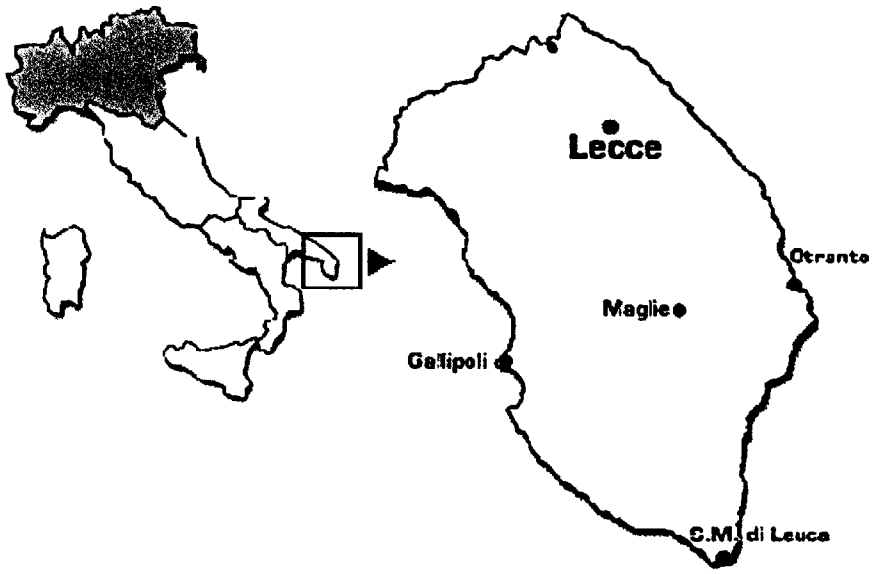

Fig. 1
Map of Salento

The Romans called Apulia *finibus terrae*, the place where "land ends." Apulia was invaded and colonized by several populations: the Greeks and the Romans, the

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Byzantines, the Lombards from the north, the Muslims who took Bari away from the Byzantines in 840 C.E., the Normans, followed by French Angevins, Spanish Aragonese, and Turks.

In 1735 Apulia was incorporated into the Bourbon kingdom of Naples and Sicily (Chiavola Birnbaum 1993:139), and until the unification of Italy (1861), it was divided into different estates, owned by a few rich barons (landlords), exploited, and scarcely cultivated. To add to the economic misery, throughout the 16th century, the population had been ravaged by epidemics of plague and malaria (see Croce 1925).

The peasants did not own the lands they worked. Most of the time they needed to walk for miles to get to work. Apulia's weather is very warm and, until the late 1960s, water was rare. Most of the peasants were illiterate and isolated from the rest of the region,

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let alone the rest of Italy. Their isolation was paired with a feeling that one's own destiny, and the destiny of one's parents and children, may never change. The extreme opposite feeling was embodied by the emigration, which many peasants embraced, especially in the early 1950s. Some of the emigrants later returned to Apulia with even less money than they had when they departed. Others were successful abroad, but sad because they had to leave their land of birth and their families behind.

Ernesto De Martino, in his text *La terra del rimorso* (1961), written after his fieldwork in Salento in 1959, writes from the perspective of the social activist. A member of the Socialist and later Communist Party, De Martino witnessed the struggle of the peasant and working class of Southen Italy (Filippucci 1996:61). His interest in tarantismo was part of a

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larger interest in the history of the Italian South after World War II, and in his belief in the political role of the social scientist as a *transformer*, for whom folklore is "a rudimentary form of class consciousness, to be transformed as the masses become emancipated." (Filippucci 1996:63).

De Martino was drawn to tarantismo after seeing pictures of the tarantati in the chapel of St. Paul (De Martino 1996:30[c1961]). When he went to Salento in 1959, he was able to identify 37 tarantate and to realize that, between the "bitten," their families, the musicians, and the believers in ritual that gathered at the time of the domestic healing, tarantismo influenced around a thousand people (44). As De Martino noticed already in 1959, the population's attitude towards the ritual varied depending on people's economic class and their level of education.

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Still today, the belief in the healing power of the ritual and in its cathartic value varies from person to person but, as social classes are being leveled and new generations enjoy an unprecedented economic comfort, the factors that influence a person's attitude pertain more to an ideological sphere than an economic one—i.e. a supportive and a believing attitude towards the performative power of rituals, aided by the commitment to the revival of local folklore in the face of a global leveling of differences.

Among the reasons for De Martino's belief in tarantismo as a cultural and religious phenomenon rather than a disease were:

1. The area of the "feud" of the Salentine town of Galatina, and the miraculous well behind the chapel of St. Paul. The presence of the chapel of St. Paul in Galatina gave this city and its

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lands immunity from the tarantula's bite and its relative symptoms (I will discuss this point more in detail in chapter 2).

2. The yearly return of the symptoms. Adds De Martino: "In other words, everything happened as if the Christian cultural influence had tried to bend a pagan phenomenon under its religious calendar and, if it had succeeded, it was in part by putting a discipline in the insurgence of the ritual crisis" (De Martino 1996:48 [c1961]).

De Martino's research confirmed that the ritual belonged to a magical and religious cultural system and that the venom was, in the anthropologist's point of view (an "etic" point of view, the point of view of the outdiser), a metaphor for socio-economic injustice,

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abuse, and suffering. In other words, the *taranta* spider and its bite were cultural signifiers. However, among the local population, the spider's bite and its symptoms were not a matter of metaphor. Women felt a bite, even when a "real" bite did not occur. The bite became accepted as a metaphor later, after the first wave of Salentine revival in the 1970s, when the etic perspective began to permeate the emic (from within the context) understanding of the ritual.

Tarantismo happened almost exclusively among poor peasant women living in a society marked by feudalism and exploitation. The religious and social morals of a Catholic peasant household did not generally include public outlets for stress-related problems or for expressions of pain, fear or dissatisfaction. The spider's bite and its cure—that could last for days and that were repeated every year—created a punctuated

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period of social and ritual performance that provided women with a space to come together and support one another.

The spider's bite provoked a rupture in the social order. The ritual gave the possessed the possibility of opening to the world and expressing their internal conflicts; at the same time the ritual was itself the product of a repressive system that ordered the individual need for and response to different social conflicts. Through the centuries, many of the possessed were women, bitten for the first time at the age of puberty.

The ritual was liberating because it provided the tarantate with a socially accepted frame for a public display of unusual behaviors. An example of the subversion of the habitual social roles in tarantismo is that of a tarantata walking in the middle of the

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small towns' squares with a powerful and authoritative stance, or one of the tarantata walking up and down the piazza on her knees.

In Southern Italy, and around the Southern Mediterranean, the animals called taranta in Salento are found and have assumed mythic qualities and personalities. Spiders, scorpions, and snakes were all sacred to the people of ancient Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Babylonia. These animals were revered and feared because of their power to renew themselves (by molting) and to cause death by their bite.

The Catholic Church refused divine associations with animals. This is clear in the example of the snake, the animal that was sacred in ancient Mediterranean religions and that became the animal manifestation of *evil*, temptation, and the cause of disaster and the human fall. However, the scene of the

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temptation in Eden is an excellent example of syncretism in which Christianity took the pre-existent symbolism and imbued it with new meaning. Statuary and iconography from around the Mediterranean show women handling snakes. In the scene of Christian creation, women and snakes were still portrayed together, but their association became dangerous and a cause of disease.

De Martino believed that, despite the symbolic heritage from the ancient worlds (thematic links between the ritual and ancient Greek mythology), tarantismo with its specific ritual symbolism and healing first originated in Salento during the Middle Ages, at a time of social change and unrest, the time of the Christian crusades, and the clash between Islam and the Greco-Roman civilization (De Martino 1996:228-241 [c1961]). During this time, according to

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De Martino, Christianity was spreading, incorporating and reshaping non-Christian and pre-Christian beliefs and rituals.

Since the Middle Ages, for example, the Italian Catholic Church has incorporated snake ceremonies. Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum mentions some of these *feste* (celebrations, parties, feasts) in her text *Black Madonnas* (1993). She sees the feste as a possible syncretism between the male-centered Catholic religion and the pre-existent cult of the goddess: "The snake festa may be interpreted as a case of the church replacing the goddess and her regenerative powers, and replacing her descendant, the fate spinning Circe, with a male saint whose relics can pacify snakes (women?) and cure snakebites." (Chiavola Birnbaum 1993:56) This statement could apply to tarantismo, too. In the case of tarantismo, since the 18th century, the regenerative

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powers of spiders and snakes and the pre-catholic elements of the ritual were taken on by the figure of St. Paul, through the construction of a chapel in Galatina, where it was believed that the saint, on his way to Rome, had once stopped.

During the Renaissance and the Baroque of the 16th and early 17th centuries, Jesuit Atanasio Kircher had treated tarantismo extensively as a form of musical therapy (see De Martino 1996:242-259). The Renaissance saw a revival of the arts, crafts, and philosophies of the ancient Mediterranean civilizations, including music therapy as it was practiced among the Pythagoreans of Southern Italian Magna Graecia (Larger Greece).

Since the 17th century, with the flowering of the Neapolitan school of medicine and its main exponents such as Francesco de Rao, Epifanio Ferdinando, and

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Giorgio Baglivi, the understanding of tarantismo was expressed in two theories. Since the start of the Enlightenment in the late 17th century, the prevalent view was the medical-psychological one. Doctors such as Epifanio Ferdinando, Girolamo Marciano, Baglivi, Caputo, De Renzi, Caruso, and very recently, Katner (1956) and Giordano (1957), saw tarantismo as either the result of a spider's bite or as result of a psychic disorder. Despite the fact that some folklorists attempted to see cultural structures and cosmology behind the ritual, it was only with De Martino that attention was paid to historical and social perspectives.

During the 20th century, a century of great socio-political changes, many of the local religious rituals were transformed, adapting to new social and economic environments. In the one hundred and fifty year-period

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since the unification of Italy in 1861, the Italian population experienced a profound change from poverty, illiteracy, and lack of a sense of nationhood, to relative wealth, prosperity, cultural transformation, unification, the establishment of a republic and the rise and fall of several ruling political parties.

During the 1950s, the spread of radio and television, and the large wave of emigration from the relatively impoverished South to the more prosperous North of Italy and to the rest of Europe, impacted Italian society in ways that were unprecedented. Isolated rural communities gained an apparent sense of connection to the rest of the nation though TV and the radio, more people were educated and could read and write, public transportation became more affordable and efficient, and the economy began to flourish, bringing electricity and water to almost every household. These

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changes impacted the peasant society in which tarantismo was practiced thus continuing the transformation of the ritual. Machines replaced manual labor in the fields (limiting the exposure of peasants to spiders' bites), and pesticides came into use that, among other insects, killed the local tarantulas whose real or imaginary bite was at the core of the ritual tradition. Moreover, in 1953, the tarantula's antidote was discovered, creating a medical alternative to the domestic ritual therapy.

Following De Martino, many scholars have written on tarantismo. Some of the most important changes in the "history of witnessing" of this ritual happened after the 1970s with the appearance of two texts: *Lettere da una tarantata* (Letters from a tarantata) (1970), by Annabella Rossi, and *Io al Santo ci credo: diario di un musico delle tarantate* (I believe in the

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Saint: a diary of the musicians of tarantate)(2000), by Luigi Stifani. In *Lettere*, Rossi, a cultural anthropologist, printed the letters she received from Anna, a tarantata in Apulia. In these letters, Anna talks about her experience of tarantismo, her relation to the bite, to its recurrence, to the saints, and so on. These letters were part of a private correspondence between Rossi and Anna who, perhaps, did not know that they were going to be published. Nevertheless, for the first time, a tarantata wrote in first person. Stifani's work, on the other hand, is a reprint of his "medical diary" when, as a musician, he travelled to Salento to heal tarantate with the sound of his violin. Shortly after the book was published, Stifani died, on the day of the festivity of St. Paul.

The ritual of tarantismo has always been in motion, changing and adapting to the social context it

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originated in. Very specific to Salento, tarantismo often has been defined as a syncretic ritual, for pre-Christian (animal totemism) and Christian elements (the presence of St. Paul, as we will see in chapter 2, is a crucial element in the ritual) merge in the ritual form. Charles Steward and Rosalind Shaw, in their introduction to the book *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism* (1994), have discussed the layers of meaning attached to the word syncretism, particularly when used with the implication that some traditions are hybrid while others are pure. To say that tarantismo is a syncretic ritual should not imply that Christian and pre-Christian traditions were otherwise. In fact, even in the history of this particular ritual, tarantismo has changed to become even more syncretic that it was in the Middle Ages. It is not the goal of this dissertation to trace the origin of the ritual, nor to

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make a cultural or aesthetic judgment about the changes it underwent during the last fifty years. However, in the course of the dissertation, I use the word *tradition* and the adjective *traditional* to describe the ritual as it was practiced before the 1980s, and to describe Salentine folk music and dance prior to the large economic and social changes in Italy in the 1960s.

I understand tradition as a fixed term describing a moving essence, like a snapshot of a dance step. When I use this term I am not imagining the reality it describes as immutable. At the same time, it was convenient for me to use this term when highlighting the dramatic changes that took place in Italian folklore since the end of World War II. I define *traditional* the music and dance forms as they were practiced by the peasants until the late 1970s. When

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the revival movement started in Salento, also in the 1970s, new instruments and arrangements were brought into the tradition and, of course, created another tradition. The work of some revivalists can be analyzed as modern or non-traditional, or it can be seen as the contemporary re-interpretation of traditional forms. I am critical of certain artists who, in my opinion, are mis-interpreting tradition. I am also aware that traditions move and there is no purpose in wanting to control their development.

Another term that needs definition is *local*. I use this term as another way to say Salentine, from the region of Salento. Even when I use the term *local* as opposed to *global*, I do not mean that locality is fixed, an enclosed reality that is separate from the rest of the world. Local, as I use this term, implies that landscape, food, dialects, economic systems,

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folklore, body language, and ways to perceive reality are specific to a region, a town, or a family tradition.

From being a local ritual of healing, tarantismo has become a healing practice used by artists in Italy and abroad. It provides new generations with symbols, sounds, and movements that create community, heal generational gaps, and reinforce pride in the local heritage (sometimes to extremes, as we shall see later). Particularly since the 1990s, the ritual has been revived in Salento and in the U.S., becoming at times a marker of local identity and, at times, a ritual open to "all women." The last two chapters of this dissertation are an analysis of these discordant and yet concurrent streams.

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How did I come to tarantismo? Or, shall I say, how did it find me? In the fall of 1997, I came to New York City from Italy to study African American music (jazz, blues, gospel, hip hop) and performance art, which I did. In the fall of 1998 I started a Masters and Ph.D. program in the Department of Performance Studies at New York University. I learned about tarantismo in the spring of 2000. At that time, I was studying frame drum with Glenn Velez in New York City, and thus became interested in drumming traditions of the Mediterranean. I became more and more interested in tarantismo and, in the fall of 2000, I took a leave from academia and spent six months in Italy, predominantly in Rome, to do some preliminary research in museums, archives and in social centers, places where many of the musical bands from Apulia came to teach music and dance workshops, and to perform.

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In the summer of 2002 I went to Salento to participate in the festivities of St. Paul (July 28th and 29th) and St. Rocco (August 15th). During my two fieldwork trips in 2000 and 2002, I visited the public library in Siena and Rome, the Ernesto De Martino archive near Florence, and the Museum of Popular Traditions in Rome, which has an outstanding archive of historical photography. I interviewed dancers Cinzia Villani and Ada Metafune, musician and researcher Luigi Chiriatti, folk revivalist and researcher Ivan della Mea, folk revivalist, musician, researcher Giovanna Marini, and university professor and folklorist Alessandro Falassi. I studied tambourine with Antonio Castrignanò, tarantella dance with Cinzia Villani and Ada Metafune, and songs and chants with Cinzia Villani and Giovanna Marini. In the fall of 2002, I taught a tarantella dance class to beginners and, in the summer

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of 2003, I was hired to work as a choreographer for the tarantella scene of Ibsen's theatre piece *A Doll's House*, directed by Caroline Raymond.[3] My training and experience as a scholar and a performer have given me many insights into the various meanings of tarantella music and dance.

Chapter 1 provides a historical introduction to the social and political changes that took place in Italy since its unification as the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. After an overview of those transformations at the national level, exploring in particular the relationship between Italian language and identity formations, I focus on the history of the Salentine peasant and working classes in the period right after World War II. The chapter ends with a discussion of the role of the leftist historians and ethnographers who worked in Southern Italian regions during this time,

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and how they applied their intellectual traditions to the study of tarantismo.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the ritual of tarantismo as it was practiced in the early 1960s. In this chapter, I analyze the symbolism of the ritual, its figures, music, dance, sacred objects, and its place in the local community. I use the main documents available to the general public, from books to articles, and analyze videotapes and recordings.

Chapter 3 presents the history of Italian folk revival between the 1960s and the mid-1970s. The revival involved literature, cinema, music, and, later, dance. It witnessed the socio-political transformations of the country since the end of World War II, and translated politics into performance and vice-versa. I situate the first "wave" of Salentine revival (1970s-1980s) at the tail end of this larger movement.

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The "second wave" of revival in Salento (1990s to the present) is the topic of Chapter 4. The second wave differed from the first wave of the revival movement for the following reasons: 1. Its cultural motivations differed from the first wave, especially in the relationship between political ideology and performance; 2. The movement involved a revival of pizzica, the local tarantella (pizzica is the name for the music and the dance), and of tarantismo, absent in the first wave. This chapter includes a critical analysis of the revival of Salentine folk music and dance, as well as a discussion of the ritual revival.

In chapter 5, the last chapter of this dissertation, I am dealing with the postmodern expansion of the tarantella phenomenon through work of Alessandra Belloni, an Italian performer who, since the late 1980s, has been reviving tarantella and the ritual

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of tarantismo in New York City. Belloni came to the USA in the mid seventies and created, with John La Barbera, the group *I Giullari di Piazza*, a theatre and music group featuring Italian folk music, dance, and theatre.

As I mentioned earlier, I met Alessandra Belloni in the spring of 2000 when I took a tambourine class with her in her studio in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, where Belloni is an Artist-in-Residence. Given the breadth of Belloni's work, I will focus my analysis on her artistic interpretation of the tarantata ritual. I will analyze Belloni's ritual "art" staging during a concert, and her "ritual" staged during one of her healing workshops.

Belloni's work is relevant at a time when some aspects of tarantismo (spirit possession, ritual music-making, dancing, and social gathering) are being absorbed by national and international businesses that

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promote the very different idiomatic genres of folk music and dance as a "universal language," easily usable in the service of an individual's well-being. In the last five years there has been an increasing interest in the ritual of tarantismo as a way to access the mythological figures of the sacred poisonous animals, the ancient power of music to heal, as well as the possibility to be tarantati without having to go through an initiation. Can the healing power of the ritual of tarantismo become accessible to a larger community without losing its local specificity? This and other questions regarding the relationship between local practices and global markets are at the core of this last chapter.

Finally, the Appendix is a creative project containing reflections and poems inspired by my research on tarantismo and by Trusting Spirit, a Costa

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Rican tarantula I had the honor of hosting for six months, between December 2002 and July 2003, in a terrarium in my apartment in Kingston, NY. My time with Trusting Spirit coincided with the time of the writing of this dissertation and the tarantula's presence in my everyday life impacted the depth and quality of this work. These writings originated in the spring of 2003, as part of a paper I wrote for composer Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening class at Rensellaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY. I want to include them in this dissertation as an extpansion of the scholarly research of this writing.

This dissertation is also about my experience in the United States and about the cultural impact that North America, with its economy and popular culture, has had on Italy since the beginning of the 20th century. It is, necessarily, about writing in English,

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and about translating ideas, language, and culture. And it is about my Italian family. I only recently found that some of my ancestors on my father's side were also emigrants who left Italy to come to Brooklyn.

All together, what I have researched, lived, and written of is about women, family, community, healing, religion, poverty, wealth, music, dance, cultural assumptions, political ideology, sexuality, memory, pain, love, passion, and the politics behind the construction of all kinds of different but interacting and overlapping identities: cultural, political, sexual, and economic, and how these come together in performance.

I wish to share these writings as part of my personal experience with Salento, the tarantella, and the ritual of tarantismo. In some respects, my dissertation is "objective" and "authoritative." In

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other respects, what I have written is personal, belonging only to me.

One last word about the title *Spider Dreams*: since the beginning of this research I have had several spider dreams. Spiders jumping, molting, biting, spinning webs, flying, and dancing. I also had dreams about the ritual. I wanted the title to reflect this very personal process of dreaming that brought me through a special period of growth. Also, I believe that spiders dream and that this dissertation is perhaps one dream spun by a tarantula.

All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

ENDNOTES:

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[1] For the reader's convenience I would like to list of the following terms again: *taranta*= tarantula; *tarantismo*=the ritual; *tarantata/tarantato*=the person

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bitten (female/male); *tarantella*= the therapeutic music and the dance used in the ritual. Both men and women have been bitten. This dissertation focuses predominantly on women tarantate. For a description of male tarantati, the reader can refer to De Martino 1996 [c1961]; Stifani 2000; and Chiriatti 2001.

[2] Throughout the dissertation, I will use the term *tarantate* to talk about the women involved in the ritual of tarantismo. In some of the quotes from other scholars, if the masculine noun *tarantati* was used in the original text (in Italian language it suffices to have one masculine noun to make all nouns masculine), I maintained the *-i* ending.

[3] The piece premiered at the Wings Theatre in NYC on July 15, 2003. My thanks to Richard Schechner for recommending my scholarship and artistic work to the director.

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Chapter 1

Constructions of Identity: The Making of the Italian Nation Through Language and Performance

An identity is the product of a comparison.
Gabriella Gribaudi (1996:72)

1.1 From Unity to Regional Revival

When preparing for presidential elections at the end of the Spring 2001, Silvio Berlusconi, the current Prime Minister of Italy, developed a program for the economic future of the nation based on what he called the three *I*-s: *Inglese* (English), *Impresa* (Business), and *Internet*. In the month before the elections, pictures of a smiling Berlusconi appeared on billboards at both major and minor intersections throughout Italy.

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The three I-s, written in large red characters, hung ominously above his head. The choice of an *I* for Inglese and the absence of a fourth *I*, the *I* for Italiano (Italian), stressed Berlusconi's political and economic fascination with U.S. politics and culture, even as it underlined the ambivalent relationship millions of Italians have to Italian, a language whose history as a national language sometimes follows and sometimes determines the history of Italy as a politically and culturally plural nation.

It was not until 1861 that various Italian states were unified into a single Kingdom of Italy. The language chosen to represent the kingdom in its economic and political relationship with the rest of Europe was the Florentine dialect used by Dante in the 14th century. In 1861, this language was predominantly the language of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and official political and religious documents; for the

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most part, it remained so until the 1950s, when television brought it into many Italian households, appealing even to those who had maintained their own dialect (De Mauro 1979:1-9). The choice of Tuscan Italian as the language of the new kingdom was the result of a desire to place the roots of Italian identity "in the history of the medieval city-states and the Renaissance, with its art, its great men, and the Italian (Tuscan) language." (Gribaudi 1996:73). This creation myth was reinforced by the understanding that the culture of a people was based on its literary production (see Filippucci 1996).

A census made in 1861 showed that 78% of the population of the newly unified Kingdom of Italy was illiterate (De Mauro 1979:37), and that most people in this percentage spoke various regional dialects. The unity of the new Kingdom was thus already separate: one the one side the "cultured" and, on the other, the

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"illiterate" which constituted most of the population and most of the Italian "south." Italian linguist Tullio De Mauro has divided the dialects into three main groups, all descending from a unique Italian-Romance root: the Northern dialects, the Tuscan dialects, and the Southern dialects. The Sardinian and the Ladin, still spoken today, are autonomous dialects isolated from the Romance tradition (21). Because of the complexity of local dialects and local folklore, it was not until the 1950s that the larger Italian population learned about other regions' lore and languages. This growing familiarity with the "Italian other" was due to massive internal migrations as well as to the increased wealth of a minority of citizens who were able to buy motor vehicles and travel cross-country (Ginsborg 1989:329-330). Also, the impact of television cannot be overstated. In the last thirty years, the percentages of families that owned a black

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and white TV were: zero in 1953, 20% in 1960, 82% in 1971, 85% in 1980 (Ginsborg 1989:584).

From the unification of Italy until the end of World War II (1861-1945), journals and newspapers had served as the privileged media of politicians and intellectuals communicating to the young nation via the written word. In politics, leaders such as Antonio Gramsci and Benito Mussolini worked or had worked as editors of prominent national journals and newspapers. In 1915 Mussolini, who started his political career as a socialist, founded the journal *Popolo d'Italia*. He edited the journal until 1922, when the *Fasci di Combattimento* (Fighting Fascist Militias) took Rome and established a Fascist dictatorship with Mussolini as supreme leader.

The role that the newspaper played in the victory of Fascism is continually stated in Mussolini's autobiography (see Mussolini 1928). In the columns of

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Popolo d'Italia, Mussolini wrote his manifestos, thoughts, beliefs, and programs for "a new Italy." He called the newspaper "his most cherished child" (39), and its office in Milan "a little fortress" (86). It was through the newspaper that the party was born, and among its main goals was the establishment of a Fascist Italian national identity. In many of the speeches that Mussolini wrote in the *Popolo d'Italia* and that he delivered from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia in Rome, "Italy/Fascism" and "Italian/Fascist" were interchangeable nouns and adjectives (Mussolini 1928:176-177; and 196).

It was on the occasion of the public speeches of Mussolini that the young poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti performed his poems and *parole in libertà* (Mussolini 1928:91). Personal contacts between Mussolini and the Futurists were established in the course of 1915 (Berghaus 1993:9). Marinetti saw art as a political

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tool, and he became very involved in the politics of the early Italian state.

Futurist avant-garde performance made its national and international appearance in the press, as well as on stage. Even before the rise of Fascism, Marinetti, a correspondent in the Italo-Turkish war in 1911, had transformed his war experiences into a powerful artistic vision of "sports, machines, and war" (Landlis 1983:62). The main inspirations for his manifestos were battlefield images that dictated the parameters of the Futurist programs.

Futurists and Fascists were both "revolutionary, subversive groups, who combined Leftist social politics with a Rightist concept of nation and government" (Berghaus 1993:9). However, Fascism never supported the ultra-modernist agenda of the Futurists. When Mussolini became Prime Minister in 1922 and later, when he established the Fascist dictatorship in 1925, he

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dismissed his revolutionary past and friendship with the Futurists. The artists, on the other hand, tried to fit into the restrictive and conservative dictates of the new bureaucracy, with the hope that the regime would support Futurist events. This never happened and, in the late 1930s, the movement began to wane (Berghaus 1993:11-12).

Under the Fascist dictatorship, freedom of artistic creation and speech were limited. Dialects were banned in schools, and traditional rituals and performances from the lower classes were framed as *folclore*, which had a Romantic and diminishing meaning attached to it (see the introduction of this dissertation; and Turchini 1987). During Fascism, local identity was studied and promoted as "an object of consumption in mass leisure," linked to "the regime's bid to present locality as a model on interclass unity,

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template for the Fascist 'corporative' state" (Filippucci 1996:60).

Many peasants and factory workers were compelled to emigrate to North and South America by economic conditions while the socialist party was formed, developing from the militant anti-Fascist workers movement. In 1906, Gramsci fought for Sardinian nationalism but the concern with peasants' conditions in the contexts of class and regional particularity accompanied him even when he left this struggle to join the working-class movement in Turin (1912-1913). His ideology was to support the formation of a "national-popular" consciousness in association with the rising power of the proletariat. In 1915, Gramsci joined the editorial staff of the Socialist weekly *Il Grido del Popolo* (The People's Scream), and later, in 1919, the newspaper l'*Ordine Nuovo* (The New Order) that supported the proletarian struggle throughout the 1920s.

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According to Gramsci, the intellectual is the philosopher interested in the "cultural environment he is proposing to modify" (Gramsci 1971:350). The question is what language, indeed what medium, to use when addressing the problems and concerns of the workers and the peasants who remained for the most part illiterate. A language that is inclusive and allows a communication between the philosopher and its "audience" is necessary. "The environment," wrote Gramsci in his prison notes, "reacts back on the philosopher and imposes on him a continual process of self-criticism. It is his 'teacher'" (350). With Gramsci's work, folklore was stripped of the misleading glittering postcard appearance that it was given during Romanticism and Fascism. At the same time, historians and ethnographers of the middle class began to study the lower classes with an attempt to change, transform, and "better" people's lives. This intellectual

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attitude, as I will discuss at the end of this chapter, also had its own problematic implications.

By 1926 the fascist government had banned opposition organizations and several politicians, artists, and intellectuals were arrested, Gramsci among them. His trial in 1928 condemned him to twenty years of prison. During these years, Gramsci kept writing. His "prison notebooks" were published after his death in 1937. Gramsci's thought was fully by the communist and socialist political parties during and after World War II. His writings were published for the first time in 1947. This is also the time when academics, as well as intellectuals and artists, began to revive folkloric performance (music, dance, and oral histories) to accompany and support political ideologies.

The period between 1945 and 1948 saw the establishment of the Italian Republic and the emergence of a new party, the *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian

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Democrats), supported internally by the Church and by Catholic conservative political exponents and, externally, by the United Stated that, in this period, played a major role in the cultural, economic and political reconstruction of Italy. In 1947, U.S. State Secretary George Marshall announced the beginning of the European Recovery Program, aka the Marshall Plan (Ginsborg 1989:101-102). The United States was looking for new economic and political markets in Europe and, at the same time, was interested in limiting socialist and communist expansion in Western Europe.

This became even more explicit in 1948 when, with Italian elections approaching, Marshall made it clear that, if the Communist Party were to win, all economic support from the U.S. would be suspended (Ginsborg 1989:152). Elections were won by pro-U.S. Christian Democrats and Italy became a republic. The other parties that were involved in the elections were the

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Socialist Party and the Communist Party that, for this occasion, had joined forces to become the *Fronte Democratico Popolare* (the Democratic Popular Front).

The Christian Democrats' leading party owned three of the six national channels (RAI-TV). At the end of the 1950s, when TV became the major mass media, the Christian Democrats and the Church were able to monitor and censor what was broadcast. The highlight of the daily programs on the RAI was the *Carosello* (Carousel), a 110-second long commercial break broadcast directly after the early evening news, when most people would be watching. Paul Ginsborg describes Carosello as:

> In every *spot*,[1] which lasted 110 seconds, the product could only be named at the beginning and for five seconds at the end; the rest of the time, cartoons were played or short stories were told. In this way, the *Carosello* attracted a large number of children who, in this intimate and familiar way, were exposed to consumerism […]. (Ginsborg 1989:327)

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The Carosello played until the early 1970s. My sister, born in 1966, remembers it as one of the most exciting events in her childhood. She writes:

> The strongest memory I have is the black and white image of the carosello with the horses that came up as the opening scene. Then some of the songs of the commercials such as, for example, "bidibodibu' tattatata bidibodi ie tattatata"[2] sung by a man who was jumping on a bed frame. I loved those songs so I was very excited before the carosello but also sad because I knew that once it was over, it was time for me to go to bed. (Biagi 2003a)

As today, with Premiere Silvio Berlusconi owning three of the six national TV channels is part of a long history of media manipulation for economic and political advantage.

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1.2 Piccoli Teatri

While the Christian Democrats used the media to advance their party, the socialist and communist avant-garde of post World War II took Gramsci's heritage and translated it into a political performance of their own addressed to the masses. As early as the 1950s, communist and socialist intellectuals, philosophers, and artists turned to music, literature, cinema, and theatre to represent the multiplicity of Italian economic and linguistic realities, not only as inherently present in the making of the nation, but as the essence and basis of a national Italian identity.

In the main cities of the peninsula, and especially in Milan, many *piccoli teatri* (little/small theatres), were founded, such as the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, the Teatro Stabile in Turin, and the Teatro Stabile in Genoa. The productions offered in the piccoli teatri were peculiar and innovative because the

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plays were performed in the local dialects and were *aperti a tutti*, "open to everybody."

The Piccolo Teatro of Milan was founded in 1947 by Paolo Grassi and Giorgio Strehler. For the first time in the history of Italian theatre, the Piccolo brought forward the possibility of theatre as a social service, open to the public, supported by national funds, and responding to the needs of the local community. The goal of Grassi and Strehler was to renew Italian theatre, to give it a new life after the conservative Fascist era.

An innovation of the Piccolo was that the theatre offered not only very high quality performances—in the first decade of the theatre's activities, Streheler directed pieces by great masters such as Gorkij, Goldoni, Brecht, Shakespeare, and Checov—but it also offered seminars and workshops, and was particularly sensitive to the needs of students and members of the

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Milanese working class (Cavaglieri 2002:12). Theatre was revived as a democratic and social institution, accessible to the people. Paolo Grassi defined the *theatre of the people* as a place open to "the middle class, workers, peasants, artisans, and intellectuals" (Grassi 2002:178 [1945]).

In 1976, the Piccolo signed an agreement with the national television (RAI), and since then the theatrical season has been broadcasted nationally (Cavaglieri 2002:14). In 1983 Strehler became the director of the Théâtre de l'Europe, instituted by the European parliament and based in Paris, and he supervises the Union of European Theatres (UTE), of which the Piccolo was the founding member (14). After Strehler's death in 1997, the Piccolo remained active and has expanded to three halls (all in the city of Milan). The new directors are Sergio Escobar and Luca Ronconi (15).

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A later example of a successful public Italian theatre is the Piccolo Teatro of Pontedera,[3] which in the 1980s gave shelter and support to Jerzi Grotowski. Born in 1974, as the *Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale* (Center for Theatre Experimentation and Research), this theater center was a highly creative institution which, like the Piccolo in Milan, was devoted to performance as well as performance training, including the creation and dissemination of new, experimental work.

In 1986, Roberto Bacci and Carla Pollastrelli, the theatre director and co-director, invited Jerzy Grotowski to Pontedera to found the *Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski,* which, in 1996, became the *Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards*. In 1999 the center became the *Fondazione Pontedera Teatro* (Foundation Pontedera Theater), a public institution—founded by the

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Province of Pontedera and Pisa[4]-active at the local, national, and international levels.

1.3 Dario Fo and Franca Rame

Two other very important figures of Italian theater in the 1950s were directors, actors, and activists Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Fo and Rame had, until this point in their careers, created political theatre pieces in which they used local dialects as well as the Italian language. Their style was very interactive, following the tradition of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

In 1963, Fo and Rame entered the world of TV, when they were invited to present the very popular program, "Canzonissima." It was a great opportunity for the theatrical leftist political avant-garde to enter the space of national media. National media owners, however, were very careful not to allow any disruption

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of the established national norm. During the second episode of *Canzonissima*, Fo made explicit commentaries on the problems of contemporary Italy: the secular and political power of the clergy, the mafia, and the industrialists. In so doing, he turned the most popular bourgeois national medium, TV, into a forum for political discussion. By entering the national idiom of television, Fo exemplified the performer as a public speaker, a resistant performer whose function was to unsettle the assumption of the righteousness of the state.

Predictably, the media power structure reacted immediately. Ettore Bernabei, the then of RAI-TV and a leading Christian Democrat, imposed major edits to the rest of Fo and Rame's episodes. When the politically active artists refused to change their scripts, Bernabei banned their work from TV altogether for thirteen years (Viola 1977:xiv-xvi).

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In 1977, when Fo and Rame came back to TV with *Mistero Buffo* (Funny Mystery), they encountered resistance from Catholic spokesmen and politicians (see Fo 1977:vii-xxii). *Mistero Buffo*, performed since 1968, is a piece in which Medieval mysteries are used to tell an oppositional history performed over and against the dominant classes in power. During the Middle Ages the jesters, *giullari*, were the live newscasters serving the illiterate. In Fo and Rame's view, the mysteries were sacred yet popular representations where, behind the religious themes, people could enact satires of the dominant classes. In this oral tradition, the masses exercised the role of critic and interpreter of contemporary culture and politics. The work of the giullare is not a solo endeavor: behind the giullare there was always a community and so the jester's voice served as the popular voice. It was this collective voice that Fo and Rame performed in *Mistero Buffo*.

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1.4 Neo-Realism

In the 1964 preface to a new edition of Italo Calvino's 1947 neo-realist book *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (The Path of the Spider's Nest), the author describes literary neo-realism as such:

> Neo-realism was not a school. (Let's be precise.) It was an ensemble of voices, mainly from the peripheries, a multiple discovery of the different Italies, and also—especially, I should say—of those Italies that had been, in literature, the most unedited. Without the variety of those Italies, unknown to one another, without the variety of the dialects and of the jargons to knead in the literary language, there would have been no "neorealism." (Calvino 1994:vii)

In 1954 Calvino began assembling his major work, *Fiabe Italiane* (Italian tales/fables). Collaborating with ethnologist Giuseppe Cocchiara, Calvino chose and transcribed from 19th century sources two hundred folk tales from various Italian regions (Calvino

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1994:xxxix). Published in 1956, *Fiabe Italiane* was a great success and a source of inspiration for artists and social activists. Even though the fables' original language had been sacrificed in the process of translation into Italian, the transcription into a "neutral" language, made comparative analysis possible.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the performance of Italian diversity and, particularly, the disparity between classes was widespread in category of the Italian performing arts. One aspect of the cultural changes going on in postwar Italy was the rise of the Italian feminist groups. The feminists developed a way of writing and thinking that was distinctly their own, as part of what they called *autocoscienza femminile* (feminist consciousness). Feminist writers such as Dacia Maraini used the Italian language to discuss femininity and feminism, reacting against fascist and Catholic gender rules (see Bono and Kemp 1991), while

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other women artists such as Giovanna Marini revived a rich repertoire of regional folk songs reframing them in the political contexts of the 1960s and 1970s. Marini was part of a larger revival of music that I will analyze in more detail in chapter 3.

In Italian cinema, neo-realist directors such as Vittorio De Sica, Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and the early Federico Fellini used techniques of documentary filmmaking to represent the socio-economic conditions of post-war Italy, from the lower classes to the bourgeoisie and the clergy. These artists developed a "new sense of national cinematic identity" (Burke 1996:3).

During the 1950s and the 1960s the collaborations between cinema and the social sciences became more frequent. *Cinema Nuovo* (New Film) was a magazine that featured new work in cinema, photography, and the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, ethnography,

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etc.). The relationship between the arts and the social sciences extended beyond cinema. While performers needed to go into the field to record songs, stories, and dances with the precision and discipline of a scientist (Carrera 1980:91), ethnographers and anthropologists began to look at ritual performances as a site for analysis of cultural behavior.

The folk revival in the different fields of performance impacted society immensely. One of the main consequences of the revival, together with the spreading of media was an unprecedented cultural exchange between the regions of Italy. An ideology of unity and unity-in-diversity was extrapolated out from local cultural practices and performed on stage, TV, radio, the cinema screen, and the page creating a new sense of national cultural identity. Underlying this was a call for the communal performance of political

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coherence, to be enacted in terms of a socialist and communist national and even international unity.

Revivalists used songs and chants from workers' and peasants' traditions of the Northern, Central, and Southern regions of Italy performing them during the same concert or writing about them side by side in the same magazine, etc.[5] Comparative analysis and performance was very illuminating. The great disparity between the industrial north and the rural south, between the few rich and the vast majority of the poor and the illiterate was highlighted. In an attempt to bridge cultural and economic disparities nationwide, socialist and communist revivalists of the 1950s and 1960s supported multidisciplinary and multivocal performances. But for all their efforts, the South predominantly remained its own region, relatively cut off from the rest of Italy.

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1.5 Salento: Historical Background

Many social revolts marked the 20th century in Salento and Apulia. In the 1920s, the peasants in Nardò, a large town in the province of Lecce, organized a great strike. The reasons were the same: to change the socio-political conditions that caused hunger, poverty, and injustice. The police repressed the strike (Chiriatti 1998:43-45). Luigi Chiriatti, in his *Opillopillopì Opillopillopà*, relates how in the early 1950s in Arneo, an area in Salento that covers the lands around Lecce, Taranto, and Brindisi the peasants struggled to stop the abuses perpetrated by landowners by occupying lands they felt rightly belonged to them (1998:37). Chiriatti's account illustrates one incident out of many that happened throughout Italy after the birth of the Italian Kingdom in 1861.

Peasants had been promised lands and work but the landowners, together with the local politicians and the

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church, continued to exploit the lower classes. In 1944 land reform was promised again. The peasants, especially those in the south where the injustices of feudalism had remained in place since the Middle Ages, anticipated a reform that would grant them an equal opportunity to work and thus to sustain their families.

In the winter of 1949-1950, peasants, tired of waiting for reform and tired of the lies of the local governments, finally occupied the Arneo. The occupation lasted for almost forty days, until the police, together with the landowners, reacted violently, using tear gas and arresting many of the occupants (Chiriatti 1998:37-42).

The internal migrations and general unrest of the 1950s affected not only the political and economic landscape but the ritual life of the region as well. Often enough, traditional rituals were degraded. This is because emigration framed the concept of *social*

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change as a positive force, something to strive for. With emigration, people began to see beyond their town, beyond what history had written as their destiny. At the same time, the easier access to media brought the concept and possibility of change in the homes. Parents began to believe that the lives of their children could be changed through education (see Santoro 1998:74-76). While access to education reduced illiteracy, considerable numbers of students attending universities in the 1960s, in the course of just one generation, they lost touch with the traditions of the land they were living on.

What happened to many Italian families that had emigrated abroad also happened to the Italian families that stayed in their towns but changed their economic and social reality through education. The horizon of their expectations as well as the material circumstances of their lives changed. They no longer

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imagined that they had to live lives marked by poverty and suffering.

In 1959, 610,000 people lived in a land of 6,000 square kilometers. Of these, 302,000 were employed and of this number, 175,000 were peasants and 60,000 were women. The land was almost a desert, with water extracted from clay wells located at large distances from each other (Bello 2000:147). The small fields that were given for the peasants to work on after the reform, had no systems of irrigation, no electricity, no roads connecting the different properties. The majority (92%) of the peasants who did not choose to emigrate were illiterate.

The 1950s were, as Italian writer Aldo Bello recalls, "horrible." He describes the situation this way: "the society of the time was suffocated by hierarchies, disciplines, and unbearable prohibitions, in schools as well as in the factories, in the offices

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as well as in church" (150). These facts support Chiavola's statement that "Apulia is a region economically subordinated to Italy's industrialized north, a case of the Gramscian dichotomy between hegemonic and subaltern cultures" (Chiavola Birnbaum 1993:114).

Since that time and continuing to the present day, Salento has been undergoing major economic and social transformations. With the economic boom of the 1950s factories were built in Taranto and other major cities of Apulia, the media entered an increasingly number of households, and political authority was transferred first from Christian Democrats to Socialist Parties, and then to right-wing parties such as Assemblea Nazionale. From a *cultura della sofferenza,* "a culture of suffering", as Luigi Chiriatti described Salentine culture between the wars (Chiriatti 1998:49), to a culture of self-affirmation of the 1990s, Salento

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became a place of relative abundance in relation to other regions surrounding the Mediterranean. From wanting to forget their past, to becoming proud of it and of tradition, the population of Salento has been negotiating the pros and cons of a cultural transformation brought about to some degree by the work of progressive anthropologists, historians, and politicians of the 1950s. It is in relation to this intersection of cultural anthropology and the traditions studied that the analysis and the later revival of tarantismo take their political place in the transformation of Salentine, and more generally, Italian culture.

1.6 The Ambiguous Role of the Ethnographer: The Case Of Apulian Tarantismo

In the complex creation of the Italian nation, the South has developed its own particular history, has

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been given its own name, the *Mezzogiorno*, and has been endowed with its own cultural myths:

> The [Italian] South is much more than a geographical area. It is a metaphor which refers to an imaginary and mythical entity, associated with both hell and paradise: it is a place of the soul and an emblem of the evil which occurs everywhere, but which in Italy has been embodied in just one part of the nation's territory, becoming one of the myths on which the nation has been built. (Gribaudi 1996:73)

In the Italian academic discourse of the 1950s, the *questione meridionale* (the Southern question) was given great importance. Because of the percentages of illiteracy among the lower strata of the population, the Italian South was hardly enclosed in the creation myth of the new Kingdom that stressed the major role of literacy in the production of culture (see Filippucci 1996; and Gribaudi 1996). In the introduction to *La*

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terra del rimorso, Ernesto De Martino recalls how Jesuits in the 16th century considered Southern Italy as "our India," *Indias de por acá*, in relation to the newly "discovered" Americas, also called by the same Jesuits "Indias of over there," *Indias de por allá* (De Martino 1994:223-24 [c1961]). The stereotypes of Southern Italians included backwardness, superstition, ignorance, idleness, pssavity and weakness (associated with femininity), and lack of socio-political consciousness.

Particularly in the Italian context of the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, what marked the South in social and anthropological discourses, was its *difference*, its separation from the North. In this negative difference, which was assumed to contain an homogeneity in itself, Southern Italians were understood to find their own identity in local myths.

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Local, in this context, was the opposite of national, rather than a part of it.

The 1950s were the years in which it slowly became apparent that the idea of a split between North and South was a myth in itself, a construction based on political choice and on the "positivist racism" that the Piedmontese ruling class of the new Kingdom expressed towards the "devils" inhabiting the "heavenly South" (Gribaudi 1996:75; for the ramification of "racial explanation of regional difference" see Schneider 1998:8-12). Anthropologists and ethnographers began to look at the *questione meridionale*, the "southern question," in political terms, creating links between history and politics, economy and religion.

The work of Ernesto De Martino was a breakthrough in this sense. The historian did not ignore ritual and popular Catholicism as important factors in the shaping of local identity and the relation of the region to the

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rest of Italy. De Martino actually dove into popular religion and ritual, convinced that awareness of those spheres of social performance was crucial to a historical, social, and political analysis (De Martino 1994:28 [c1961]). De Martino's vocation as an ethnographer was to analyze and describe the reality that needed to be *transformed.* He was one of those Italian scholars who viewed research as a political action, as a cultural modifier able to improve and transform socio-economic realities (24). He wrote in 1951:

> To us [the intellectuals/activists/social scientists] this cultural life of the people oriented toward the past must certainly be of interest, not of course from a tourist' point of view nor for love of the picturesque, nor even for the erudite zeal of preserving the most archaic memories of our populace, but for the much more serious and difficult reason that to modify the tradition it is necessary to know it, and to

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> realize the program of unification of the national culture… a judicious coming to terms with popular tradition as essential." (quoted in Saunders 1998: 188).

De Martino was part of what was then called "progressive" folklore, marked by a leftist political approach to folklore. In a way similar to Gramsci's, de Martino's view of Southern Italian tradition was ambiguous: on the one hand he talked of peasants popular religious beliefs as archaic and somehow resistant to modernization and social amelioration; on the other, he (like Gramsci) saw peasant culture as opposed to dominant culture (the culture of Italian middle class, aristocracy, and clergy), and thus capable to inspire social transformation (just by being oppositional).

He conceived tarantismo, for example, as a "relic" of old folk beliefs, a "shadow" from the past that

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darkened a new society in the making (De Martino 1994:25 and 35 [c1961]). Understood in terms of "remains," "relics," and fragments, popular beliefs and practices were criticized as non-modern and, in a sense, as impending upon the modernization of the Italian South (Saunders 1998:186). At the same time the ritual practice of tarantismo was, for de Martino, a proof of individualism from the part of the Salentine, a social resistance to the "ahistoricity" that their economic and social status had put them in. This ambivalent political and intellectual attitude towards folklore is well expressed by this quote by George Saunders:

> The fragmentary nature of folklore and of popular religion, the ahistorical quality of the "survivals" of the past combined with the historicity of the oppositional elements with potential for the future, all suggest the need for a thorough and genuine analysis of the "real," concrete examples of popular religion. Popular

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> religion this *may* contain the potential [...] for creating new forms of consciousness on the part of the subaltern groups. But it also may not. (saunders 1998:187).

Annabella Rossi, a student of De Martino, was a cultural anthropologist whose research until her death in 1984 focused on Salento and other Southern Italian regions. Rossi, like De Martino, often underlined the importance of her cultural role as an ethnographer. Talking about Maria di Nardò, one of the tarantate she met while in Salento with De Martino's team in 1959, Rossi believed that making Maria aware of her status and social reality (i.e. giving her the "objectivity" of the social scientist), would arm her with a "tool of opposition to the condition of cultural exploitation" so typical of many people of Southern Italy (qtd. in Esposito 2002:31).

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Vincenzo Esposito writes that in the work of Rossi the attention to the emic, reflexive, "from the inside" (versus the etic, from the outside) interpretation is always present. Rossi accomplishes this by including the "voice" of the local people describing their feelings, thoughts, and the reality of their lives. For example Rossi defines Anna, the tarantata of her book *Lettere da una tarantata* as the "anthropologist of her town" (qtd. in Esposito 2002:47).

Not unlike De Martino, Rossi related to the peasants with ambiguity: bringing awareness to the people was the anthropologist's mission, sometimes carried out with the violence of a religious missionary. In other words, the task of transforming the lives of the subaltern classes (to better people's lives), was at times paradoxically realized through private violation or, as Rossi defines it, "violence of the ethnologist":

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> By winning the secrecy and the hostility of the interviewees, the ethnologist tries to document the past, the history, and the existence of a subaltern class that, in many cases, has not yet acquired self-knowledge, and cannot be able to witness itself directly, without external mediators. There is violence in this relationship, but it is a necessary violence, unless and until these men and women become, as De Martino wished, the protagonists of the story, that is culturally and politically aware. (qtd. in Esposito 2002:35)

This work violated the privacy of the local population, sometimes undermining the rituals that precariously held the fragile social balance of the towns together. These disruptions, which Rossi defines as the ethnologist's "necessary violence," are evident in the description and the images of the rituals written by the anthropologists.

De Martino's description of the exorcism of Maria di Nardò is probably the most famous example. The

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rushing of the foreigners (De Martino's team) into the small circle of friends, children, family, and musician healers during the ritual, most certainly disrupted the privacy of the ritual itself. At the same time, their presence at the event resulted in one of the most important written descriptions of the ritual, to the point that De Martino's account became for later researchers and artists, almost the "original" ritual itself.

The irritation and violence experienced by the local population at the presence of the researchers is evident in many of the photographs taken at the site of the chapel of St. Paul in Galatina. One can read indignation and anger in the looks that family members and friends directed towards the cameras. Also, there are many reports of cameramen, reporters, and researchers being attacked or harassed by the tarantate themselves. Filmmaker Gianfranco Mingozzi describes his

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experience in Galatina in 1961 when a tarantata dressed in black saw him and his team filming the event and menacingly shook her wrist and shouted at them.

The saints' festivals were so important in Southern Italy that, when peasants immigrated to the United States in the late 19th century, the *festa* became a pivotal moment in the social life of Italian Americans. In the words of Rudolph J. Vecoli:

> The cult of the patron saint was perhaps the strongest emotional bond, outside the family, which tied the immigrants to each other and to the distant *paese* [town, land, country]. Not surprisingly then, the *festa* was the most vital and vivid expression of Italian immigrant culture in America. (Vecoli 1977:30).

In Apulia, the feast of SS. Peter and Paul attracted (as it still does) people from the adjacent towns and regions. Moreover, the healing figure of St. Paul welcomed the tarantate who could adopt

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behaviors that otherwise would not be accepted outside these events, such as crying, screaming, walking on one's knees, rolling on the floor, entering a trance, licking the ground on one's way to the saint's shrine or chapel.

Most of the religious festivities are centered around the healing powers of the saints. The Apulian examples are St. Paul and St. Donato. St. Paul, the protector of venomous insects and reptiles and also the healer from their bites, is celebrated in Galatina on the 28 and 29 of June. St. Donato is the protector of the epileptic and is venerated in Montesano on the 6 of August. Many of the devotees who go to their yearly appointment with the saints, either to ask for a healing grace or to thank the saint for healing they have already received, have not been bitten or do not suffer from epilepsy.

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The "cultural" and "religious" constructions of what constitutes illness and healing are explicit in tarantismo, for example, or in the *male di S. Donato* ("The Illness of St. Donato").

Remembering that most of the peasant population was still illiterate in the 1960s, it is not too difficult to understand the crucial role that the Church (the official Catholic church as well as its popular adaptations and transformations) played in cultural shaping and censorship, through its access to written language as well as to the spiritual and moral principles of the people. The Catholic Church had also an impact on local songs and tales, censoring, encouraging or changing them until the early 1950s, when the anthropologists, the ethnologists, and the artists began recording them.[6]

It was into this complex social, political, economic, religious, and ideological world that

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De Martino plunged when he arrived in Salento on June 1959. His landmark research on tarantismo embodied all the complexities of the dichotomy between the scholar and the people he studied. *La terra del rimorso* (1961) is a seminal book in the study of tarantismo, offering the detailed and poetic description of ritual performances, as well as providing the reader with historical information and critical perspective. In this intellectual context, tarantismo was a phenomenon that deserved consideration but it was also believed to be doomed as soon as modernization brought Salento outside of its rural nature and poverty.

ENDNOTES:

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[1] In English in the original text.

[2] Onomatopoeia used, in the commercial, to describe a playful attitude.

[3] Pontedera is a small town in Tuscany.

[4] Pisa is a small city in Tuscany.

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[5] See for example, the work by the *Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano* in the 1950s and 1960s, described and commented in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

[6] I would like to thank Ivan della Mea for making me aware of the impact of the Church on oral music and the history of folk revival; this point emerged during a private interview with della Mea on January 7th, 2001.

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Chapter 2

The Ritual of Tarantismo

Tarantismo is a Southern Italian healing ritual that was practiced in the region of Salento, Apulia. When I visited Salento in the summer of 2002 I was not able to witness the ritual as it was portrayed in previous ethnological, cinematic, and photographic documents. Since the 1980s the ritual was very rarely performed domestically and publicly. Because of the large number of strangers visiting Salento each year to witness the ritual, the local population had to withdraw from the areas traditionally selected for the ritual (among them, the chapel of St. Paul in Galatina, a town in Salento).

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During my visit in 2002, Luigi Chiriatti, a scholar and musician of the area, told me that the women of Salentine towns had changed the location of their ritual sites and that there was, among the local population, an effort to keep the sites protected from the invasion of the external population, particularly from people who were coming to the sites only out of curiosity. Chiriatti generously took me to the *dolmen of St. Paul*, a prehistoric dolmen with a small cave at its bottom. Another site used for the veneration of St. Paul of the tarantulas, the cave had two mural paintings on its walls, the image of St. Paul and a spider web, and it was filled with candles and flowers. Some women were standing right outside, praying.

Because it was impossible for me to experience the ritual in first person, this chapter is predominantly a historical account of the ritual. It is however interspersed with my own experience in Salento, from

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which follows part of my understanding of the transformations the ritual has undergone during the last fifty years.

2.1 The Ritual

Generally speaking, taranta is a popular name given to the spider *latrodectus tredicim guttatus*, whose bite provokes the effects of a general intoxication (excessive sweating, cramps, acute pain especially around the abdominal area, visual hallucinations, anxiety, presages of death, spasms to the upper and lower limbs) with a related psychomotor excitement (Della Ragione 1997:66). The bite can also affect the nervous system provoking neurological disorders (Jervis 1996:293 [1961]).

In the traditional tarantismo system, people believed that the bite had an acoustic quality to it. When the taranta bit, it released a melody with the

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venom. The acoustics of the venom matched the anthropomorphic characteristics of the animal. In the local cultural system of belief, the taranta was one entity, characterized by a first and last name, a personal history, and a civic status (she has a name, and moral qualitites). The civic status, mood and character of the taranta were suggested by the sound, the dance, and the colors it resonated with during the healing ritual—i.e. the woman bitten by the tarantula danced to certain melodies and not others, chose certain steps and not others, and reacted negatively or positively to certain colors and not others. The colors used in the ritual were mainly red, yellow, and green, depending on whether the taranta was young or old, married, single, a libertine or a mourning widow, and depending on her mood (she could be angry, calm, wild, mourning, tired, etc.). It was understood that the venom had a different vibration (tempo and melody)

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according to the personality of the taranta. In other words, the personality of the spider was contained in the specificity of her venom. The consequent intoxication from a spider was likewise specific to these parameters.

Tarantismo was a cathartic ritual used to excite chaos in a traditional society and, at the same time, to bring chaos back whithin "the norm." In general, we can say that even if tarantismo was initially the result of intoxication due to a spider's bite, and even if a spider's bite may sometimes be present at the beginning of the ritual "crisis," the ritual itself was not reducible to the physiological effects of a venomous intoxication. As Giovanni Jervis observed in 1959, tarantismo as an actual intoxication is very rare and was definitely not behind the ritual bites that he witnessed during his fieldwork (Jervis 1996:294).

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The bite required a specific healing ritual that involved music, dance, colors, and the presence of symbolic objects. Interestingly, even when an actual bite initiated in part the crisis of the bitten, even after the actual symptoms were healed, the bitten would retain the behavioral patterns of the tarantata.

Among the last seven hundred years of therapeutic dance traditions in Salento, *tarantella* appeared in the beginning of the 17th century. *Pizzica*, the name of the Salentine tarantella, appeared later, between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries (Gala 2002:118). In tarantismo, the women bitten by the tarantula need to dance the pizzica (later called *pizzica tarantata* to differ it from the *pizzica pizzica*, a courting dance), to hear its music, and to perform a healing ritual that, in this dissertation, I will refer to as the *tarantata ritual* or the *ritual of tarantismo*.

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The women bitten were predominantly peasants, coming from a society based on agriculture with a strict social stratification. Despite almost a hundred years of emigrations to the north of Italy and Europe, the concept of change and mobility among the peasant population were not often in the reach. Most of the women De Martino met in his 1959 fieldwork were illiterate, lived in very poor and unhealthy domestic environments, had several children, worked very hard for very little remuneration, and had little or non-existent sexual freedom.

The bite could happen in the home or in the fields. In most cases, the tarantata did not see a spider but felt its bite. Sometimes bitten women saw the after effects of the spider's attack, the irritation on the skin or, very rarely, the bite's mark on the flesh (as De Martino's suggests, the irritation could have also been caused by being rubbed against one

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of the irritating plants local to the area). Once bitten, the community recognized that the afflicted person needed to be healed. This healing happened twice: the first musical-choreographic cure was domestic and more intimate (only musicians, relatives and some friends were present); the second, more public, was performed in the chapel of St. Paul in Galatina.

In the first phase of the cure, musicians were notified about the possession and they gathered in the house of the tarantata. The space where the ritual took place had a specific setting. A white sheet was usually spread out on the floor, delimiting the perimeter of the ritual space. Around the perimeter of the sheet pictures of SS. Peter and Paul were displayed next to colored strips of cloth that were used by the tarantata in the process of identifying the chromatic nature of the spider.

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The length of the ritual was different each time, depending on how much the woman felt she needed to dance to expel the venom, and also depending on how long it took for St. Paul to interceed for the tarantata. When St. Paul did not grace the possessed, she danced again the following year, around the time of the first bite. If the woman "received the grace," she may or may not dance around the anniversary of the first bite. De Martino named the recurrence of the symptoms *rimorso* (which in Italian means both re-bite, but also remorse), making a link between what people called "a real bite" and his understanding of the bite as a metaphor and a myth, of which re-morse could be one meaning (De Martino 1996 [c1961]).

The people who participated in the domestic ritual were the tarantata, the musicians, and a small crowd of witnesses, composed by family members and friends. Since the appearance of De Martino's team in Salento,

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in the late 1950s, scholars have also been among the ritual witnesses. While the tarantata and the musicians were involved in the ritual music and dance, people around the ritual circle held the space for the tarantata. In some of the pictures of the ritual, we see people stand, watching. There is always a woman, sometimes more than one, in the circle with the tarantata with a pillow in her hand, ready to assist her at the moment of her fall on the ground.

Some water and food could be given to the tarantata after she had been dancing for a long time, but usually the women refused the intake of any sort of substance. The lack of food during the ritual was not coming from a prohibition. It was mostly due to the fact that the women experienced the general symptoms of intoxication before and during the ritual and may have had nausea and a lack of appetite.

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The musicians, on the other hand, demanded food, wine, and a fee for the total duration of the ritual. The tarantella healing could last for days, and no matter how long the ritual healing would take, musicians were fed at the expense of the family of the tarantata. The refusal or acceptance of food on the part of the tarantata was one of the signs to test her possession state. The refusal to eat was a sign of the "disease," of being tarantata. On the other hand, if during the ritual the tarantata welcomed food, this was interpreted as a sign of an imminent healing or heavenly intercession. The healing could come at any time.

Ernesto De Martino observed a domestic tarantella ritual in the town of Nardò in 1959, with Maria, a 29-year-old tarantata. His experience is documented in his text *La terra del rimorso* (The Land of Re-Bite/Remorse) (1961). Coming in from the bright white light of day,

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De Martino and his research team found themselves in a dark, very small room in which a crowd of people were packed to watch the tarantata dance on the ceremonial white sheet spread out on the floor. The room was bare and without windows. On one side musicians were playing a tarantella that was a specific healing melody for this particular woman. The woman interacted physically with the music. Her ritual choreography involved getting closer to the musicians, bringing her ears closer to the drum and the violin, almost as if she was reaching out for the sounds, or drinking the sounds from their source.

The choreography was repeated in the following cycles:

1. The woman went down onto the floor and became the spider. She lay on her back and moved around the sheet by pushing her torso by bending and extending her legs. She shook her head from side

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to side, usually keeping in time to the beat of the music. She also thrust her pelvis upwards violently and arched her back.

2. The woman stood and danced, then ran in a circle around the perimeter of the sheet.
3. Overtaken by fatigue she collapsed onto the floor, supported by a woman helper that would promptly put a pillow under the tarantata's head to protect her from injury when she fell.

The musicians stopped playing only when the woman fell on the floor where she remained for about 15 minutes. While the tarantata paused, the musicians rested. Without this respite, the musicians would not stop playing until St. Paul, by virtue of his intercession, heals the tarantata for the year. It can take up to three days or more for the healing to arrive. Sometimes it takes years. Maria received the

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grace on the second day of the healing. Here is De Martino's description of Maria's grace:

> While all present were observing the signs of an imminent healing, the tarantata interrupted one of her runs around the ceremonial sheet, gestured the musicians to stop playing, and firmly walked toward the bed, where she rested, looking at the scene with some surprise and smiling. (De Martino 1996:71)

The musicians tried to play a tarantella for her again, to see if she would react, but she kept resting. This was the definitive confirmation that the woman was healed and that the ritual was over. Later Maria said that she had heard the voice of St. Paul who, "with a low tone and in dialect had murmured in her ear: *I grant you the grace*" (De Martino 1996:72 [c1961]).

In other cases, especially when the grace from St. Paul did not come, the ritual could end after several days depending on: 1. The wealth of the family,

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as musicians needed to be paid and fed daily; 2. The strength of the woman and her capacity to keep dancing.

The physical and mental state of the tarantata immediately after the end of the ritual varied. After the healing session, Maria could not remember what had happened or even who was present at the ritual. Some of the women also experienced a sense of exhaustion due to the fast and energetic dance of the healing tarantella.

The spider's bite let loose the symptoms of tarantismo, which both released and channeled a specific kind of "organized chaos." Through the steady rhythm of the drum, the individual and her crisis were brought back from a personal and perhaps pathological state into the social and religious order. But this "acceptance" of tarantismo could not occur without the physical and emotional expressions of grief, sadness,

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exhilaration, fear, anger, frustration, pain being thoroughly performed.

When the grace was granted, the tarantata was healed, restored, and publicly re-entering the standard of normality of her social context. When the grace was not granted, there was a feeling of sadness, delusion, and pain still afflicting the woman. The exhaustion accompanied the symptoms of the bite, not yet expelled. The words of researcher Maurizio Nocera express the feelings that exist behind the conditions of being a tarantata, caught in the cycle of *morso* and *rimorso*:

> Once you enter the cycle of the *morso e rimorso* (the bite and the re-bite, the remorse) you can never exit: you can keep playing with life, spending moments here and there, but you cannot escape from the bite and the re-bite. It's a key. It's the key of life and death of people of Salento. [...] The bite of the tarantula of Salento is mythical, ideal, and therefore deeply rooted in the collective unconscious of the people of this

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> land. […] It is the symbolic archetype of an ancient rupture, the mythic result of a furious battle between life and death, culture and nature, the divine and the mortal. (Chiriatti 2001:8-9)

After the description of the ritual of Maria of Nardò in *La terra del rimorso*, De Martino proceeded to explain, at the sociologic level, the background of the woman and the possible relation of a forbidden love to the spider's bite. Maria was not allowed to marry the man she loved and was promised to another man. This was the time when she was first bitten. Then, before the pre-arranged marriage, Maria had a visitation from St. Paul who ordered her not to marry at all, and to become his mystical wife. After a series of events, Maria still had to marry the unloved man and, right before the wedding, St. Paul ordered that she would be bitten a second time, at the same time and in the same location of her first bite (De Martino 1996:73-76

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[c1961]). This is an example of how the figure of St. Paul was materialized into a real lover, making decisions and acting on the premises of jealousy and vengeance.

Outside some exceptions, like the one we have just discussed, the bite happened during the summer. This was: 1. The time in which women and men usually were in the fields harvesting; 2. The time during which the spiders' venom was (and is) the strongest; 3. The time of pre-Christian and Catholic Christian summer rituals and festivities (i.e., Beltane in May; the summer solstice at the end of June); 4. A time of great economic importance for cultures based on agriculture. A fatal bite during this time could lead to economic and social distress.

A social analysis of the bite is the focus of the book *Lettere da una tarantata* (1970), in which sociologist Annabella Rossi reproduces the letters that

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Anna, a 72 year-old tarantata that Rossi met in 1959 while working in the field with De Martino, wrote to the anthropologist between 1959 and 1965. The first time Annabella Rossi and Anna met was in the chapel of St. Paul in Galatina. Later the anthropologist visited Anna in her house and still later the women started a correspondence.

Anna's family was made of peasants who owned some property the father left to the male children. At the time of the correspondence Anna lived alone in a simple apartment, without a toilet or restroom. The furniture consisted of a bed, a table, two chairs, a drawer and a gas stove (Rossi 1970:6). Anna had suffered from epileptic seizures since her childhood. She believed that her disease, *il male* (which in Italian means both illness, disease, and evil), required the special protection by two saints, San Donato and San Paolo (St. Donato and St. Paul), the first being the protector

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against epilepsy, and the second being the protector of all the Salentine tarantati. Anna's crises and seizures reached their peak during the period preceding the saints' festivals: June 28th and 29th for San Paolo, and August 8th for San Donato.

Believing that her illness had a sacred origin gave Anna a particular role in society. Rossi wrote:

> Her disease, accompanied by highly religious manifestations, gives her, in the community context, a distinctive sign so that she is not believed to be abnormal or sick, but she is given an informal role in which the psychic anomaly is part of a magical horizon. (Rossi 1970:7)

Anna was singled out by her illness, but she was nevertheless accepted by her social environment because she and the people in her town understood her "difference" in the context of shared popular religious and healing beliefs. Rossi noticed that during the day of St. Paul and St. Donato people who came to the

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saints were people who did not "present any precise psychic illness, but a variety of disturbances caused by different social, economic, and cultural reasons" (Rossi 1970:8). In Anna's case, she suffered from isolation. Caught in a wave of drastic economic and cultural changes (the 1960s), Anna felt isolated from the rest of the town. Her letter exchange with Rossi was a testimonial of her loneliness and the attachment she displayed towards the anthropologist was punctuated by love letters and complaints, on Anna's side, for the scarcity of letters she received from Rossi.

Isolation in the social context of women's lives was a shared feeling among the tarantate. The ritual provided them with an opportunity to meet each other, spend time together and to heal and help each other. Isolation was a burden in a rural setting, especially if the women were not married or had lost their husbands and/or siblings.

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When, in 1978, Luigi Chiriatti met Cristina, a tarantata who was also suffering from isolation when she was bitten, her "crisis" was a result of her emigration from Salento to Switzerland in the 1960s. Once back in Salento, at the age of 40 and after 12 years of emigration, Cristina had some difficulties being accepted in her town of origin. Very few women had the chance or privilege to live abroad and to start a new life. If they had to come back, these women were marginalized, considered loose, and treated with envy and jealousy. One day, while picking tobacco leaves, ignored by the other women workers, Cristina *felt* her first bite: she felt "touched by the sword of St. Paul" (Chiriatti 2001:18). She fell on the ground and became very sick.

Cristina first tried Western medical treatments which involved electroshock sessions (Chiriatti 2001:18), but once these treatments proved

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unsuccessful, other women of her town suggested that she may be tarantata. She was brought to the chapel of St. Paul in Galatina and was healed in that year. She returned to Galatina each subsequent year on the saint's festival at the end of June. In 1981 she received an intercession from St. Paul. The woman saw St. Paul "cut the web of her taranta in a thousand pieces with his sword" (Chiriatti, 2001:82).

Cristina's husband was present at the moment of the saint's intercession. He agreed: "Yes, yes, he [St. Paul] took the blood of the taranta from her. I was there and saw blood flow, while the saint was telling us that this was the blood of the spider" (Chiriatti, 2001:87). Later, he told Chiriatti that the blood was collected in a cloth menstrual pad, and that the pad—once submerged in water to be washed—dissolved, assuming the form of a spider web (Chiriatti 2001:87).

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2.2 St. Paul of the Taranta

In this battle between the divine and the mortal, the figure of St. Paul is certainly highlighted. St. Paul is the patron saint of all those souls bitten or "charmed" by venomous animals, granting the possessed *la grazia* (the grace) necessary for the healing to take place. St. Paul is an ambiguous figure: he is a savior and, at the same time, he is a furious and jealous "husband." In Luigi Chiriatti's words:

> [St. Paul is] a jealous and vindictive saint [...], a mediator with whom tarantate speak, ask, compromise, swear, and whom, in the end, they respect and fear. They submit themselves to his will, under the pressure of the feeling of guilt that is at the base of Christian religiosity. (Chiriatti 2001:28)

At the time of the bite and during the dancing, the tarantata might have seen St. Paul's image or heard his voice. The saint's participation in the ritual

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determined the second part of the healing, which consisted of a visit of the tarantate to the saint's chapel in the Apulian town of Galatina. While the bite and healing in a home could happen at any time (though it usually happened during the summer), the visit at the chapel only took place on the 29th of June, the day of the festival of SS. Peter and Paul. Only on that day was the chapel open to the public.

The relationship between the tarantate and St. Paul had several layers of meaning. The St. Paul of the Acts of the Apostles was *and* was not the St. Paul of the ritual of tarantismo. In the Acts, we read that St. Paul, on his way to Rome, was shipwrecked and landed on the island of Malta (Luke 28:2-15). Standing on the beach, shivering in the cold, St. Paul wanted to start a fire to warm his body. In gathering some wood sticks he was bitten by a snake. St. Paul shook his bloodied hand and, instead of dying from the venom as

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the island people expected, the saint did not show any symptoms of the bite. The Catholic Church designated this episode as the beginning of Malta's conversion to Christianity.

From this moment St. Paul became the protector of the bitten. Popular belief since the Middle Ages attributed to St. Paul the power to heal the bitten. His waters (waters collected from wells situated on the paths he presumably walked) were miraculous and his followers, called the *stirpe dei sanpaolari* (The Heritage of the People of St. Paul), are thought to have healing abilities (see Montinaro 1996).

St. Paul entered the ritual of tarantismo during the 18th century, when his chapel was built in Galatina. According to legend, St. Paul had stopped in Galatina on his way to Rome and, hosted by a very religious man, thanked him by saving people bitten by spiders, scorpions, and snakes by using of the water of a well

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located in his host's house, later named *Casa di S. Paolo* (St. Paul's Home) (De Martino 1996:107-110; and 255-257). Already at the beginning of the 18th century, tarantati stopped in Galatina to drink the water from the well. In 1752, Don Nicola Vignola, a wealthy man of the region, bought the home. The chapel that stands there today was built by Vignola and consecrated in 1793 to include the well in the sacristy (De Martino 1996:108-109).

Starting in the early 19th century, the procession to the chapel and the public display of women's disease and healing became key elements in the local tarantata ritual system. St. Paul's grace became necessary to the complete healing process for the bitten. The believers said that when the waters of the well became white or green, this was the sign that the blessings of the saint were in it. This white water caused the tarantate to vomit and to expel the poison of the bite. The

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tarantate saw St. Paul's sacred animals in the water (snakes predominantly), and believed them to be curative.

Luigi Caiuli, a painter from Galatina who saw tarantate in the chapel when he was growing up, told me that the water was white because at the beginning of the summer, the town hall put lime in the water to sterilize it and to make it ready for the peasants to drink and to water their lands (Caiuli 2002). But the sterilization needs some time to take effect, and while the water is white it is not fit for drinking. This whitening of the water took place in June so that on the 28th, when the tarantate drank the water, it was still white and not yet ready for consumption. Drinking lime-laced water made the women vomit, said Caiuli, not the saint's grace. Here we have a clear case of a "rational explanation" being set up against a "ritual" or "mythical" explanation.

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The practice of drinking the water from St. Paul's well stopped in 1959 when the mayor of the town closed the well for health reasons asserting that its waters were polluted. De Martino described a scene he witnessed in 1959, when the tarantate went to the well, and found it closed:

> Dressed in white, the tarantati walked to the sacristy, stopped bewildered at the sight of the walled-up well, the tomb that contained the miraculous water and the "animals of St. Paul": then, they moved away, to disappear in the whirl of the chapel, as restless shadows emerged from the realm of the dead. (De Martino 1996:118)

Some people complained but their "weak complaints" were not heard (Montinaro, 1996:37), and the well remains closed to this day (see fig. 2).

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Fig. 2
St. Paul's Well, Galatina 2002
(Source: Laura Biagi)

Praise and devotion to St. Paul continued in the form of songs and invocations. These were sung by the musicians during the ritual in a private house and/or sung by the tarantata to St. Paul in his chapel in Galatina.

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Songs belonging to the ritual of tarantismo date back to the 16th century (see Kircher 1643). Ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella recorded this song to St. Paul in Galatina, 1959 (De Martino 1996:353):

Oh Santu Paulu meu de Galatina
facitene la grazia stammatina
Santu Paulo meu delle tarante
facitene la grazia a tutte quante

(Oh St. Paul of Galatina
grant us the grace this morning
Oh St. Paul of the tarante
grant us all the grace)

When the saint granted *la grazia*, his voice was heard by the tarantata and/or his image appeared. This moment of the ritual is rich with symbolic cultural and religious meanings. It combined elements found outside the Catholic tradition (possession states induced the

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bite of venomous animals cured through music and dance) with elements found in the Catholic tradition (St. Paul as the patron saint of the bitten/possessed). This duality is performed symbolically on the body of the tarantata. While spiders bit the lower extremities of the body (the feet, the ankles, the legs, and the thighs, the pubis), St. Paul entered the women through orifices located in their heads (the ear with sound, and the eyes with a vision). The mapping of the body through lower and upper regions is significant, particularly when the lower body contains the seed of possession, disease, and abnormality, and the upper body is figured as the region of salvation through the intervention of the Church.

But the relationship between the tarantata ritual and the Christian tradition was not limited to religious or cultural beliefs. There was also an economic aspect behind the ritual's symbolism. To

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guarantee the saint's pity, the tarantate had to bring St. Paul offerings in his chapel. Most of the time people brought money, but some people also offered jewelry items, such as necklaces or rings.

In the chapel, the domestic ritual was re-enacted, but this time without the musicians who, according to the local Catholic tradition, were not allowed to play tarantella music inside churches. According to De Martino, the lack of music in the chapel left the bitten without the steady, grounding, ordering, and healing beat of the drums. In the summer of 2002, when I visited the chapel on the days of the saint's festivities, no drummer entered the chapel except that in the space adjacent to the entrance many drummers and dancers were celebrating to the rhythm of the pizzica-pizzica (see fig. 3). However, today musicians are not forbidden to play in the chapel.

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Some of the tarantate performed their own domestic cure; others, usually the ones who could not afford to call the musicians for a domestic cures, danced in the Church for the first time, asking the saint for the grace.

Fig. 3
Musicians outside St. Paul's chapel.
Galatina 2002
(Source: Laura Biagi)

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The tarantata was both possessed by the spider and mystically inspired by the voice of the saint. The spider was not a divinity (perhaps she was once, in pre-Christian days) but, during the ritual, it was often interchanged with the figure of St. Paul. In one of the tarantella's songs we hear:

O Santu Paulu meu delle tarante
pizzichi le caruse tutte quante
O Santu Paulu meu delle tarante
che pizzichi le caruse 'nmezz'all'anche, e le fai sante
O Santu Paulo meu de li scorpioni
che pizzichi li carusi int'ai balloni

(Oh my St. Paul of the tarante
you bite all the women
Oh my Saint Paul of the tarante
you bite them in between the legs
and make them saints
Oh my St. Paul of the scorpions
you bite the men inside their trousers)

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St. Paul often became the spider whose bite is "in between the legs" for the women and "inside the trousers" for the men. From this we can see how the dance movements made while being possessed (the thrusting of the pelvis, the crawling on the floor) had a sexual connotation. Here is a gestural double-entendre. The medical explanation for these movements was that they were derived from the spasm caused by a real tarantula's bite, which caused acute pain in the abdominal area. However, when the bite was regarded in its ritual-mythical aspect, the sexual associations linking the movements to the saint's bite were cathartic, performed to organize chaos when women released their personal traumas through repressed sexual energy.

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2.3 The Music

George Rouget, in his work *La musique et la trance* (Music and Trance) (1990), discusses tarantismo as a case of spirit possession (296-308). The possession state experienced by the bitten is a time of liberation, when the spider's venom is expelled; at the same time, the performer identifies with the spider. During the ritual, the spider manifests its personality by means of its music, colors, and dance. In tarantismo, music authenticates the possession and renders it understandable by the community. Music, writes Rouget, turns the altered behavior of the possessed into something "normal." The role of music, then, is to reframe in a social context a condition that would otherwise seem a "merely individual, unpredictable, and uncontrollable behavioral phenomenon" (Rouget 1990:320).

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For many years, the Catholic Church tolerated the tarantata ritual because it was monetarily profitable. However, the Catholic concept of exorcism—a term that De Martino uses for the healing ritual of tarantismo—does not completely fit the practice. While the figure of St. Paul is invoked to help the tarantata during the ritual (the saint becomes the exorcist), the possession in tarantismo, like in *candomblé* or *voudun*, is *identificatory*. During the ritual, the bitten identifies with the possessing spirit by embodying its movements, reacting to its colors, dancing to its musical modes, melodies, and rhythms. This is not the case with Catholic exorcism, which is rarely performed with music and dance. It was therefore a matter of time before the Church would reject tarantismo. Furthermore, the Church does not grant divine, totemic, or any kind of supernatural status to animals.

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French sociologist Georges Lapassades defines tarantismo as a case of *adorcism* (*to take in/call the spirit*), rather than exorcism (*to take out the spirit*) (2001:28-29). Alessandro Portelli understands the difference between adorcism and exorcism as a question of rhythm. He writes:

> The repetitive quality of musical time, especially in some musical forms that are based on rhythm, introduces a different relation to time, order and disorder. In adorcism, rhythmic repetition functions as obsession: it provides the way out of ordinary time and the way into another time, the time of possession. In tarantismo, on the other hand, time provides an order, regularity: what works is the escape from the crisis of one's personal presence and the recovery of a form of order and self control.(Portelli 2002:71)

Seen this way, music was part of the cure, the way out of possession rather than an introduction into possession. However, Portelli seems to undervalue the

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role that music played in the diagnostic part of the tarantella ritual. When the musicians went to heal the tarantata, they played different tunes to test which one fit the venom of the bitten. In tarantismo, music was the acoustic quality of the venom: it matched in sound and rhythm the venom of the spider and, by replicating it musically, successfully expelled it by means of sympathetic vibration.

In order to be a good healer, a musician needed to know many tunes because the spider's venom could take many forms—as many spiders as existed, there were an equal number of melodies. This meant that the "theatre of the tarantulas" required many different roles. Each spider had a different personality and her spirit infused her venom with a particular melody, and a specific vibration and rhythm. As in homeopathic medical practice, the healer of tarantismo worked by matching the quality of the sickness. At the level of

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vibration, we can talk about the same intensity and amplitude of vibration. For this reason, I call the healing ritual of tarantismo a form of *acoustic homeopathy.*[1]

Sometimes the musicians also sang songs for the tarantata. These songs, like the music, came from the traditional repertoire of tarantellas. The lyrics often included invocations to St. Paul (as in the example I quoted earlier), or directly incited the tarantata to dance and to expel the spider's venom.

Unfortunately, many people do not know the difference between trance and spirit possession, and today, the Salentine healing tarantella, the *pizzica tarantata,* is often understood as a trance dance that can provide a rhythm "out of ordinary time." The music may still be part of the cure even as it has become a way into trance. In a powerful paradox, the music creates that which it gets rid of.

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The musical instruments used in the ritual of tarantismo and in traditional Salentine tarantella music are: the *tamburellˆo* (frame drum with jingles), the *chitarra battente* (the strumming guitar), the *organetto* (concertina), and the violin. In a *pizzica pizzica* (a tarantella for the courting dance with the same name), the drum and the guitar sustain the rhythm while the violin, the melodic instrument *par excellence* develops the melodies. The organetto sometimes contributes to the melodic line, as does the guitar from time to time.

The tambourine is the predominant instrument in the healing ritual. Made of goatskin with a wooden frame and jingles inserted into the frame, the tambourine has been part of musical healing in various Mediterranean traditions for several millennia (see Redmond 1997).

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When Luigi Chiriatti met Maestro Giovannino, a tambourine maker, he learned that the drum is the synthesis of the tarantata musical therapy, "a synthesis of symbols." (Chiriatti 2001:27) He writes:

> Giovanni told me that the drum is the most important instrument for the musical therapy of the tarantati […]. The frame, the jingles and the skin need to be assembled in a particular way so that they produce the effect they are built for: to make the tarantata dance. He later told me that the wooden frame (*lu farnaru*) represents, in its spherical form, the world-universe or the magical circle in which the ritual takes place. (Chiriatti 2001:27)

Some of the local musicians have described the rhythmic sound as the meeting of heaven and earth, or the equilibrium that results when order and chaos balance each other. In the fall of 2000, in Rome, I took a tambourine class with Antonio Castrignanò, a young *tamburellista* (frame drum player) from Apulia.

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Castrignanò explained to me that the tamburello expresses certain definite meanings associated with the ritual: the metal friction that causes the tambourine to jingle represents the chaos of the trance, while the steady stroke of the hand expresses how order is made from chaos. Understood in these terms, the musicians rhythmically and melodically regulate the tarantata's transformation from chaos back to social normality.

The drum marks the rhythm of the music. Tarantella is based on a 6/8 tempo with a triplet for each beat. The downbeat is accented by a hand stroke on the skin of the drum, while triplets are obtained through a rotary motion of the hand near the upper frame of the drum. For each beat, the hand makes three movements, striking the skin of the drum at the center, near the frame, and back at the center. This rotary motion creates the acoustic triplet with the metal jingles, typical to tarantella.

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The social role of musicians in Southern Italy is very complex. In the tradition of Salentine tarantismo, musicians are both performers and healers. Always engaging other activities for their main source of income—they were barbers, peasants, gravediggers, and so on—musicians have nevertheless always demanded a fee and food to play for the tarantate. Considered professional musicians and healers by the community, musicians were respected and consulted at times of crisis, particularly for the diagnosis and therapy of the bitten. The gift of music and healing was not necessarily handed down from a family member to the next.

According to Luigi Stifani, a violinist well known in Galatina for the healing efficacy of his playing, there were three main musical modes to cure a tarantata: a major, minor and deaf mode. The major and minor modes are self-explanatory. But what is the "deaf

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mode" and how was it employed? The deaf mode was used to cure the bite of a *taranta sorda*, a deaf tarantula. When bitten by the deaf spider, one did not necessarily feel like dancing; the possessed remained sitting or lying on the floor and, in these instances, healed herself by composing her own melodies with their own associated movements. The spider was understood to be deaf when the musicians were not able to find the right tune to excite the ritual dance or, perhaps, when there were no musicians available to play for the ritual. In other words, the system included the possibility of a ritual failure, with its own justification: the taranta could not hear, so music could not perform the cure.

The first thing that a musician healer needed to do was to diagnose the type of tarantula that bit the tarantata. Stifani explains his diagnostic method this way:

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> First I look at her [the tarantata] in the eyes, and if the venom is there, I can already see it. Then I check the vibration to see if the person is excited or not. Third, you need to look at the tips of the foot. If they can't stand still, you can feel electricity in the air. It's different from a nervous attack, which only lasts for a while. If all these things are not present, it's useless to go and play; it's better not to go in order to save money and avoid other complications. (Chiriatti 2001:49)

When the tarantata presented all the symptoms of the bite, Stifani made all the efforts to find the right melody and to alleviate the pains of the bitten:

> I feel that the people suffer a lot and then I try to do my best to find the right melody. If you don't find the right melody she won't dance. [...] If you guess, the tarantata begins to dance for as long as St. Paul commanded her to dance. The venom is stimulated and they vomit and rest. (Chiriatti 2001:49)

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The musicians themselves never went into a trance. To use Richard Schechner's phrasing, they are *transported* and not *transformed* (Schechner 1985:117-150). The musicians are the agents of change who themselves do not change. While the possessed undergo a radical psychophysical transformation during the course of the ritual, the musicians "go along," are transported into the special time-space of the ritual, but are not changed by the ritual. They must remain outside as the instigators, coordinators, and moderators of the ritual.[2] This is not the case with the bitten, who emerge healed, fundamentally transformed. Also, the musicians never talk to St. Paul during the ritual, nor did they hear his voice. As Stifani said to Luigi Chiriatti: "They, the tarantati, speak with the saint, and then they tell us what he told them. But we [the musicians], we never hear the saint" (Chiriatti 2001:48).

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In the year 2000, the diary of Luigi Stifani was published. The appearance of the diary was one signal among several that a shift in the academic studies of the tarantata ritual had taken place. Until very recently, the scholars who visited the sites and wrote about the ritual were "outsiders." Stifani's diary is the first written account of a tarantismo musician-healer. Stifani worked with historian Ernesto De Martino as a "native informant" providing local information and offering cultural directions to follow. However, Stifani's name was never mentioned by De Martino, nor was his musical analysis quoted in the final version of De Martino's book *La terra del rimorso*.

In his diary, Stifani describes in detail the different tarantate he healed, how he diagnosed the type of spider that bit them, and what tarantella he played to heal them. The title of the diary *Io al santo*

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ci credo (I Believe In The Saint), is a quote from Stifani himself, who repeatedly stated that after he witnessed the ritual and saw what the tarantate could do (dance for hours, roll on the floor, climb walls, and how their behavior changed when they received St. Paul's grace), he definitely believed in St. Paul and his power (Chiriatti 2001:50).

Stifani is one of the last musician healers of this tradition. Most of the musicians today have lost knowledge of the details of all the different tarantellas used for the diagnosis. Because the tarantata ritual has slowly changed, it "disappeared" in its traditional form, and so the particulars of its therapy have also changed.

2.4 Ritual in Motion

In the specific case of tarantismo, the decline of ritual practice might be due to the discovery of the

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antidote for the *latrodectus'* venom in 1953 that has obliterated the therapeutic need for the ritual. Where rational, modern medicine is available, where is the need for a ritual cure? Or the decline may be due to the emergence of a global economy that, behind the appearance of an improvement of peasants' lives, is actually eroding local traditions by making available numerous kinds of global media. And, because of insecticides and new methods of farming, there are fewer spiders in the area, resulting in fewer bites. Most probably, the decline of the tarantella ritual is due to all of these factors combined.

Because so much of the ritual revolves around a very specific mythology that relies heavily on socio-economic conditions of poverty and illiteracy, once these conditions changed, the ritual not only transformed in how it was performed, but its practice severely declined. The socio-economic conditions of

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Salento have improved since the 1960s. There is now running water and electricity almost everywhere. Women have access to cultural information from outside of their villages, younger generations use the media, including the internet, and Western medicine offers cures for diseases for which folk medicine had created its own rituals, myths, and cures.

Since the 1960s there are fewer domestic cures than before. In 1959 the number of tarantati that De Martino found was no more than a hundred, and Chiriatti writes that the number of tarantati at the beginning of the 1970s was nine and that, in 1994, it went down to two (Chiriatti 2001:38).

Ernesto De Martino blamed the beginning of the decline of the ritual of tarantismo on the Catholic "invasion" and appropriation of the non-Christian symbolism of the ritual, the spider. The Church could not allow the figure of an animal to become a spiritual

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and cultural icon thus, since the end of the 17th century, it included it within the cult of St. Paul and his liturgical festivities at the beginning of the summer.

Another factor that should be considered when reflecting on the disappearance of tarantismo is the increasing presence of strangers during the festivities of St. Peter and Paul in Galatina. Increasingly since the 1950s, people from other towns have come to witness the rites. Among them are various scholars, historians, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists. These people bring with them recording equipment, cameras, and other paraphernalia. They observe, photograph, take notes, tape record, listen, and ask questions. They remain on the circumference, but their very presence in number creates, if not an outright disruption, an undeniable pressure on what happens. On the other hand, the ones from outside of

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the community have abused the previously delicate permeability of the ritual circle. The circle has, over a period of fifty years, not simply been permeated, but more brutally ripped asunder.

The people who felt this disruption the most were the tarantate themselves. Tarantismo was not a ritual practice that required the presence of people from outside the community. Christian morality had, on the contrary, framed it as an exorcism, as a state of possession that was shameful, inappropriate and indecent. Until recently (until the second wave of Salentine folklore that I will discuss more in detail in chapter 4 and 5) to be a tarantata was publicly shameful for the women and their families. Tarantismo was considered an affliction, an illness, a physical and mental state that required healing and purification. For these reasons, the crowd of curious

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outsiders was even less welcome. Tarantismo was not a state that was proudly displayed by the women.

As the crowd of the outsiders became larger each year, the crowd of the tarantate became smaller. Every year there have been fewer and fewer women coming to the chapel of St. Paul in Galatina at the end of June.

2.5 Salento 2002

When I visited Galatina in the summer of 2002, I was aware of all of this. I sat in the chapel and prayed and noticed men and women coming and going, who tasted the emotion of being in a ritual site for a couple of minutes and then left. The chapel itself was turned into a little museum, with a profusion of candles on the altar and a print with a quote about tarantismo. Eventually I left the site of the chapel and walked around town, leaving the crowd to spend some quiet time in the streets. I was overwhelmed by all the

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implications of my presence there. I wanted to see a tarantata and, at the same time, I was almost relieved that none of them had come to the yearly appointment with the saint.

Galatina's main square and streets adjacent to the "chiesa madre" (the "mother church," the Cathedral of St. Peter) and the nearby chapel of St. Paul, swarmed with people, among which many were tourists. On the sides of the square and streets, numerous merchants had set up shops and stands selling food, local artifacts, pictures of the saints, colored strings, tamburelli, as well as tapes, books, CDs, and videos concerning tarantismo and related topics.

A local cultural association was selling t-shirts with a drawing of the local tarantula, and calendars with historical images of the tarantate and of the healer-musicians. For each month, there was a quote from one of the most famous texts written on the topic,

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as well as local recipes and drawings of spiders and spider's webs. The same cultural association was displaying, in the windows of its small office in the main square of the town, a real local tarantula in a small terrarium. A *tabaccaio*, a tobacco shop similar to an American deli, was selling postcards with the image of a bleeding hand beating on a tambourine and the drawing of a spider right above it.

On the side of the main square, right next to St. Paul's chapel, there was a video projection of Gianfranco Mingozzi's short film *Tarantata*. The film, a 1962 black and white documentary of the ritual, was projected during a concert of one of the local bands. The band was playing tarantellas among other traditional songs. The ritual had been trasnformed into a performance of itself.

This popular recreation of the ritual reflects the desire, over the last ten years, to resurrect the

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tarantella ritual. The majority of the local youth, teenagers and youth in their 20s, are learning about this potent local healing practice from books and videos. For them, tarantismo is both a distant and close phenomenon that is putting Salento, a relatively small and out of the way region, on the map of "exotic" lands as home to spiritual practices and mystic stories. The practice of tarantismo brings outsiders to town, and this is exciting, as well as economically rewarding. For the youth who did not experience first-hand the misery and socio-economic struggles of the recent past, tarantismo now resonates more with "world music" and dance associations than with peasant hardship.

This revival and all the events related to it help create a sense of belonging and a pride that was not attached to the ritual until the early 1990s. Local political and social leaders are interested in the

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ritual as an example of local folklore (sometimes reviving the romantic usage of the word). The growing academic and artistic interest in the ritual at the national and international levels, coupled with the interest of younger generations in trance and altered states of consciousness, make tarantismo a well suited attraction for tourists. Local businesses flower during the summer months, and some people even display pride when interviewed about tarantismo and local traditions. Some people find that the disappearance of the ritual is a sign of the progress of the local economy and culture. Other people feel a sense of sadness at the loss of this ritual tradition, and do not welcome the way tarantismo has been turned into an object of display, a product for sale.

Tarantismo, however, does not only remain as a business and a display of "old traditions." The reinvention of its meanings is constantly renewed and

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adapted to the demands of the contemporary (for example, images of the ritual are diplayed on postcards as well as being projected on a high-tech screen in the *piazza* of Galatina; the music and dance of the pizzica tarantata are performed on stage with high-tech amplification and instruments). Also, the revived music and dance of the pizzica pizzica contains musical and choreographic elements of the ritual. In the lyrics of the pizzica pizzica, some of the words used are borrowed from the ritual songs—such as the invocations to St. Paul, for example, "Oh Santu Paulo meu delle tarante" (My St. Paul of the tarantulas), or the old healers' recognition of the ritual symptoms of the bite such as "Se vedi ca te cotula lu pede…" (If you notice that the foot is moving—referring to one of the signs that the tarantata is reacting to a specific melody), or the words of encouragement for the bitten with

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incitements to dance such as "Balla bedda mia, balla forte…" (Dance my beautiful one, dance with strength).

There are also echoes of the ritual in the folk dances, performed in the *ronda*. Traditional folk dances include the *pizzica pizzica*, a playful and courting tarantella dance and the *pizzica scherma*, the "fencing pizzica," in which the dance of two men (predominantly), symbolizes their challenging each other to a duel.[3]

Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation contain an analysis of the folk revival in Italy beginning in the 1960s. Parallel to the change of many folk rituals and arts of Southern Italy, folk revival re-established the value of traditional arts in a political manner, making a connection between tradition and socio-political identity.

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ENDNOTES:

[1] In homeopathy, there is a tarentula remedy, the *Tarentula Hispanica/Lycosa Tarentula*. The Lycosa Tarentula is the Southern Italian wolf spider found in Apulia. The tincture derived from the whole live spider is used to treat ailments of the nervous system such as "mental and physical restlessness, and mania with extreme impatience and restlessness," as well as "heart disorders." In women, the remedy is given for "ovarian disease [...] and sensitive genitalia." Finally, the remedy is also used for "headaches with a sensation of needles pricking the brain, and respiratory problems, such as coughing" (Lockie and Geddes 1995: 109). The symptoms, quite similar to those of tarantismo, are not necessarily related to a spider's bite.

[2] In the revival of tarantella and tarantismo, the musicians have changed their relationship to the music. They now talk about a change of consciousness that happens when they play at concerts. Some speak of these experiences as trance states.

[3] In my experience of analyzing and dancing the courting pizzica pizzica, I noticed that I could tell who, among the dancers, knew about the ritual of the pizzica tarantata in depth and who did not. Generally speaking,

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there is a care and a level of respect in the dancer who understands the interconnection between the ritual and the courting dance (as they emerge from the same social context).

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Chapter 3

History of Italian Folk Music Revival: 1950s to 1970s

In 1953, Alan Lomax, the American ethnomusicologist and scholar, came to Italy intending to record Italian folk songs.[1] Once in Italy, Lomax met with Giorgio Nataletti, then director of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, and of RAI (Italian National Radio and Television).[2] In the CD notes of Lomax' collection of Italian songs called *Italian Treasury*, we read that as Nataletti played many recordings for Lomax, he indicated the places of origin of the songs by pinning flags on a map of Italy. Seeing that most places on the map were empty, Lomax returned to London where he had previously worked for the BBC on a program

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of Spanish folk music and persuaded them to finance the collecting of Italian folk songs. With the help of the Italian National Center for the Study of Folk Music he was able to get the collaboration of Diego Carpitella, a well-established ethnomusicologist and a teacher at the Music Conservatory of St. Cecilia in Rome, as well as a researcher and assistant of the National Center and of RAI-TV.

This was a propitious time for Lomax to come to Italy and to bring forward a discourse, both cultural and political, on the importance of recording folklore and of letting the nation know about its different local realities. With his project, Lomax directly stimulated the revival of Italian folk music. In other cultural fields, as in literature and cinema, for example, other artists had already started working with local dialects and cultures. In Neorealist movies, for example, the sites were shot in real settings—homes,

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the suburbs, a rural community, the village—and more often than not, the actors were chosen from among the local population and were not professional performers.

Many of the intellectuals and artists who were politically active in the socialist and communist party at the time were inspired by the social and political revolts that were taking place in the U.S. The struggles of African-Americans as well as the workers protests, rock and roll and rhythm and blues songs with their politically charged texts, American folk revival, and jazz with its subversive improvisations and free playing (banished in the last decade of Fascism): a multisensory call for freedom and equality was reaching Italy together with capitalist politics as played out by the Christian Democrats.

When I interviewed Ivan della Mea, one of the main exponents of the folk music revival, I said that I started my research after studying American jazz,

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blues, gospel, and rhythm and blues. Mea was not surprised. He said that most of the Italian revivalists of the 1950s and 1960s were also passionately appreciative of African-American music, culture, and progressive politics (Della Mea 2001).

At the same time, when Lomax arrived in the early 1950s, he saw how the traditional southern Italian culture was being threatened by imported American music and culture. He wrote:

> Our barbarous centralized culture is now rapidly destroying this ancient treasury of musical traditions. So far as the Italian amusement industry is concerned, the only worthwhile native song traditions are those of Naples and the Alps. The combined battery of radio, television, and the jukebox pours out a steady barrage of Neapolitan songs, American jazz and opera, day in and day out, as if some unseen musical administrators had resolved to wipe out the enemy, folk music, as quickly as possible. (Lomax 1999:4 [c1958])

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The Italian culture of the 1950s contained many paradoxes. Lomax situates them in the context of cultural economy, placing the disappearance of folk music in the hands of "some unseen musical administrator." However, this disappearance was often desired by the peasants and emigrants themselves who, most of the time, preferred to escape the memories of poverty and sadness that the songs referred to, and looked at U.S. glamour and wealth as a way out, as an occasion to shed the skin of a difficult past. While revivalists, most of whom were members of the middle class, appreciated the political and lyrical power of work and protest songs, the workers and peasants often left their land and culture behind, trying to reconstruct their identity and "to begin again."

Diego Carpitella, who worked as an assistant for historian Ernesto De Martino, joined Lomax on what he called a "voyage of discovery" (Carpitella 1998:7

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[c1989]). For the *Italian Treasury* series, Lomax and Carpitella went to the field to record. The singers mostly did not think of themselves as performers. Their songs were part of their daily life. But this was not always the case. In Lomax collection, we also find recordings of folk groups who did perform publicly.

At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, many artists felt that the revival of folklore was a potential political tool. In 1957 the *Cantacronache* group was founded in Turin (Northern Italy). Composed of musicians and with the occasional help of Italo Calvino who wrote lyrics for the group, the *Cantacronache* revived *Resistenza* folk songs and performed them on stage.[3]

A politically engaged researcher of the time, Gianni Bosio, created the *Istituto Ernesto De Martino*, named after the historian. At the same time and in connection with the Institute, a new group, *Il Nuovo*

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Canzoniere Italiano (NCI) was born. The relationship between the politics of the NCI and Bosio's was so close that once the researcher died in 1971, the group itself lost cohesion (Della Mea 2001).

The NCI had a significant national impact, both at the cultural and at the political levels. It was a collective of professionals from diverse fields: urban singer-songwriters, urban folk singers, classical musicians, scholars, and poets. The activity of the group started in 1962 as a literary journal (*Il Canzoniere Rivista*) interested in the revival of folklore: folk music and dance, as well as local oral culture, and regional dialects.

In 1964 the group assembled several performers and performed folk songs live on stage under the banner of *Canzoniere Spettacoli.* A third branch of this group included revivalists who composed their own songs "in the traditional style." To sum it up, we can say that

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by the mid 1960s three main fields coexisted in the complex world of the music revival: 1) Original fieldwork recordings; 2) Artists' interpretations of folk music; 3) New work by revivalists who were inspired by folk music.

At the beginning of the NCI's musical activities, revived songs did not have the precision and detail that was later added. Giovanna Marini, for example, a member of the group who was a well-trained Western music guitarist, filtered the songs through what was later defined as a "scholastic urbanization," typical of the urban middle class of Central and Southern Italy. The process of urbanization consisted of keeping the songs' original melodies and rhythms, but translating part of the texts from the dialects into Italian or giving the songs a formal beginning and end for the purpose of public performance (Carrera 1979a:364).

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In 1964, at the *Festival dei Due Mondi* in Spoleto, the NCI was joined by other musicians interested in reviving folk songs, staged the concert *Bella Ciao*.[4] *Bella Ciao* is the title of a women's work song from the early 20th century. The song is about the harshness of working in the rice fields in the early morning, and about landowners' abuse of peasants. At the end of World War II, the song was revived by the partisans and its lyrics changed to describe the valorous death of a freedom fighter. The NCI included this song in the performance. Only one performer, Giovanna Daffini, was an agricultural worker who had sung the songs in the fields. The other performers were researchers who had learned the songs through their own or others' research.

Bella Ciao caused a great scandal. The musicians appeared on stage in their everyday clothes; they sang protest songs against *i padroni* (the landlords, factory

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owners, and bosses in general), who exploited the masses and created class division. The Spoleto festival attracted many political and high-class celebrities who rightly perceived that this defiant performance was aimed at them.

During this concert, a landmark of the revival of the '60s, songs from different regions of Italy were performed on the same stage by the same performers. The performance was also unique because it did not romanticize folk music and dance. The artists appeared on stage without special costumes or setting. Peasant culture was presented as a vibrant phenomenon speaking directly not only about its own life, but to an audience of notables and middle class people.

The piece was considered *lavoro di avanguardia*, "avant-garde work." It was contemporary and political-historical rather than packaged as a mysterious, simplistic, or timeless reality far from the concerns

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of the present. Filippo Crivelli, who directed the performance, staged it in "poor theatre" style. The stage contained women and men sitting on wooden chairs. The performers were storytellers and professional singers and musicians. *Bella Ciao's* repertory included work songs, love songs, protest songs, prison songs, and emigration songs (Crivelli 1974:1).

The theme of the performance was *fatica* (fatigue, struggle). Songs depicting the hardship of work opened and closed the performance. In between were songs that expressed the pleasures of feasting and loving, and the sadness and pain of war and emigration. Here are some examples from the performance libretto:

WORK SONGS

***Bella Ciao* (Farewell My Lady)**

Alla mattina, appena alzata
O bella ciao
(...) in risaia mi tocca andar

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(…) Il capo in piedi col suo bastone
o bella ciao
(…) e noi curve a lavorar

O mamma mia o che tormento
o bella ciao
(…) io t'invoco ogni doman

Ma verrá un giorno che tutte quante
o bella ciao
(…) lavoreremo in libertà

(In the morning as soon as I wake up
Farewell Fair Lady
I have to go to the rice fields

The boss standing with his cane
Farewell Fair Lady
and us, bent to work

Mother, what a torment
Farewell Fair Lady
I invoke you every day

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There will come the day when we all
Farewell Fair Lady
we all will work in freedom)

LOVE SONGS

In su Monti Gonare, Sardinia region

(On the Gonare Mountains)

In su Monti Gonare
b'hant duas filumenas
cantan a boche a boche

In su Monti Gonare
mi bides mortu innoche
si de me non t'appenas
bellezza pura e rara

(*On the Gonara mountain*
there are two birds
they sing voice to voice

On the Gonara mountain
you will see me dying
if you don't take pity on me

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pure and rare beauty)

WAR SONGS:

Addio Padre (Farewell Father)

Addio padre e madre addio
che per la guerra mi tocca partir
ma che fu triste il mio destino
che per l'Italia mi tocca morir
(...)

(Farewell father and mother
I am leaving for war
my fate is sad
I will have to die for Italy)

For all its success, the NCI found itself at an *impasse* once confronted with the question of how to stage their work. They did not know what kind of movement ought to accompany the "theatre of the voice." The originality of the songs was not only expressed in the timbre, color, and emission of the voice, but also in the physical effort of the ritual activity that went

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with it. The question became one of determining how much of this should be shown onstage. This question grew in importance as the artists-researchers wanted to show not only the music itself but also the function of the songs.

This problem was addressed in the 1966 theatrical performance of the music, *Ci ragiono e canto*, directed by Dario Fo. The performers were the same *Canzoniere Italiano* but this time their work on stage included the movement of the social choreography of work and ritual songs. Even though the movements were staged and stylized, they allowed the performers to "feel" the intent bwehind the songs and, thefefore, to add menaing to the music. When I interviewed Ivan della Mea, a NCI member currently working as the director of the Istituto Ernesto De Martino in Florence, a large archive of folk music, he told me how the need to physically perform the music changed the whole approach

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to the songs. The intention was not to imitate but to use theatrical language to make the interpretation whole. In 1966 the concerts of NCI became a national phenomenon. As Ivan della Mea recalls:

> The NCI had a strong ground [in its audience]. You knew that there were ears out there that were listening. Sometimes, the audience reached 20,000 to 30,000 people, for example at the concert we gave at the Unity Festival in Florence. Even the television came because these audience numbers could not be ignored. (Della Mea 2001)

By the end of the 1960s and increasingly in the 1970s, several performers of the NCI started working mainly on their individual work. The 1970s were the years in which many solo albums were released. As time went on, the group began to fall apart - predominantly because of the political discrepancies inside the Communist Party and the decline of the tight relationship between the party and the revivalists. In

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1980 the Canzoniere was formally dissolved. However, della Mea told me that sometimes he "revives" the name of the NCI for his concerts of folk music (Della Mea 2001).

By the late 1960s and the early 1970s, other revival music collectives and companies were founded, especially in southern Italy. In 1967, Roberto De Simone started the Neapolitan *Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare* that recorded music throughout the 1970s. In the late 1970s the *Nuova Compagnia* became more active in theatre and, under the direction of de Simone, created very successful performances such as *La Gatta Cenerentola* [The She-Cat Cinderella](1976), and *La cantata dei pastori* [The Shepherds' Song](1981).

In the early 1970s, Apulian artists and intellectuals became active in the folk revival scene that was happening at the national level. There were two waves of revival in Salento: the first, from the

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1970s to the early 1980s, which I will analyze more in detail later in this chapter; and the second, from the 1990s to the present.

3.1 The Question of Ritual Function of "the Original"

From the beginning, the work of revival artists raised two main questions: one about the function of the songs and one about the concept of originality. Both questions are still very relevant for musicians who are interested in traditional material. Every song in the folk repertory is associated with a specific everyday function. Work songs, love songs, lullabies, prayers, songs for the dead, and laments all address specific functions for which individual songs were created. The function is not only an intention or an occasion. The function determines the melody and the rhythm of a song. The first question for a revivalist is: once a song leaves its original context, how should

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the revivalist behave in relation to the songs' original function?

Ivan Della Mea, when thinking back about the activities of the NCI, said of its cultural function:

> The NCI was a political and cultural referent and this was its function. This is why, in our bibliography, one can find Pier Paolo Pasolini as well as Luigi Nono [an experimental music composer]: we were interested in a political left that was larger than the one created by the Communist Party. (Della Mea 2001)

Giovanna Marini, also a member of the NCI and a classically trained guitarist who has dedicated the last 25 years of her life in reviving songs and composing new songs in which she uses traditional harmonic and melodic modules, said:

> It is important, when studying ritual songs, (…) to think of the function to which they are attached. When I myself sing these songs, removing them from their original context and thus robbing

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> them of their function, I always strive to give them a new one, within the spectacular ritual of the concert, where the function is to tell a story, to convey emotions, to entertain. (Marini 2000: 1)

I studied with Marini in Italy when I took her fall 2000 class at the School of Popular Music of Testaccio in Rome. Our textbook was *Modes of Oral Tradition*, a book filled with transcriptions of oral music. I studied traditional tunes that were transcribed by Marini or other musicologists. Marini was very strict about performing the right interpretation. She would spend whatever time it took on a melodic phrase so that the student would sing it as it was written. This approach was, clearly, a bit confusing: we were asked to interpret oral music by learning its written form. However, this pedagogy comes from Marini's own method of interpretation, the method

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of a classically trained musician who analyses folk music.

From around the mid 1960s, Marini started composing her own work. She takes modes and specific phrases from oral traditions. The unique strength of Marini's quartet is that she is able to shape the voices so that they bring together the specific qualities of style and timbre of different regions and of different vocal styles. Her quartet consists of a folk singer, an experimental singer, an early music interpreter, and Marini herself.

I agree with Marini that traditional songs embody old stories. Whenever I perform traditional songs in the U.S., I feel that a story is being restored. I believe that the traditional function of a song can be maintained. I believe further that performers of ritual songs should also be able to understand the songs' contexts of origin and to tap into the songs' ancestral

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wisdom. The contemporary singer needs to revive a song's ritual as well as its aesthetic form.

I also agree with Marini that one of the functions of performance is "to tell a story, to convey emotions, to entertain." On a similar note, in his article "The Transcription of Ethnic Music," Luigi Lezzi describes the "passing from one note to another by way of emotional glissandi" (Lezzi 1999:67). Not being controlled or expressed by a system of writing, music based on oral traditions relies on the immediate and embodied expression of emotions. After several of my performances, women and men have approached me with different feelings of joy, melancholy, and relief. Many audience members, mostly of Italian descent, have thanked me for gathering the songs and for performing them abroad. Many of them have later called me back to tell me that my performance gave them the courage to

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find out more about their Italian and Italian-American heritage.

The next question concerns originality. In the context of oral culture, is it possible to talk about an original performance? And is it possible to talk about an original context? What traditional music becomes once it is taken out of its original context continues to trouble many scholars and artists. If, on one side, revivalists want to preserve the musical and choreographic peculiarities of a region, on the other side, no one can ignore that music and dance constantly change and that, in fact, the power of art derives from change. The folk revival in Italy started while people in their daily lives were still singing songs. This continues to be true today. In a single region one can have the older singers singing at a gathering/social festivities while the younger generations perform the same songs on stage, adding electric guitars, bass, and

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keyboards. Italy is a country in which the most traditional and the most experimental arts live side by side.

Alessandro Carrera notes that during the first half of the 1970s folk music became a mass phenomenon. This is "the development and, for certain aspects, the conclusion of the folk music revival that had, in a more or less undercover way, interested Italy since the end of the 1950s" (1979a:358). It was not until the 1970s that revival reached Salento.

3.2 The "First Wave" of Revival in Salento: the 1970s

The music and dance traditions of the tarantella, handed down from one generation to the next, have been, since the 1970s, staged for cultural festivals and concerts. In the 1970s the *gruppi di riproposta* (revival groups) took the traditional lyrics of the tarantella, adapted them to the new political struggle

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of peasants and workers, put them to tarantella music, and performed the resulting music on stage. During the national political struggles of the time, and especially in affiliation to the activities of the Italian Communist Party, these performances had a great impact on the Italian population.

The difference between the activity of the revival groups in the 1970s and the 1990s in Salento, led me to differentiate between the "first wave" (1970s and early 1980s) and "second wave" (1990s) of Salentine folk revival. After a period of political fervor in the 1970s, in which revivalists saw in the Communist Party, which many of them had joined, the means to recover their identity both as individuals (workers, students, peasants), as a part of a local community (Salentine, in this case), and as part of a larger community (the Italian and international Communist Party), the 1980s

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was a period of stasis, disillusionment, and lack of interest in the revival movement.

In the second wave, performers did not affiliate themselves with any particular political party. This may be due to the political changes that happened in Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall at the end of the 1980s. The revival in the 1990s was more tied to the question of local versus global identity—a discourse that was widespread in that decade—than it was to the proletarian/peasant political struggle of the Italian 1970s. Another difference between the first and second waves of revival in Salento was that, while the revival of tarantella and tarantismo was present but not predominant in the first wave, it became a central focus of the second wave. The revival of the ritual practice of tarantismo became an anchor for a political discourse on local identity.

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Nowadays there are many music groups playing the traditional style of tarantellas: Aramirè, Aracne Mediterranea, Zoé, Menamenamó, Alla Bua are only a few. The level of commitment to the preservation of the musical tradition varies. Some groups only work with traditional instruments and arrangements; others incorporate electric instruments, such as the electric bass and/or the synthesizers, drum sets as well as instruments that are not originally from the local musical tradition. The peculiarities of this new wave of revival are the topic of the next chapter.

The 1970s were marked by the activities of individual researchers and with the revival work of the *Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino,* the strongest of the revival groups. The choices that revivalists had to make in the Salento of the 1970s were no different from the key questions that the NCI asked itself a decade earlier: does revival mean to preserve or does it mean

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to change? If one of the functions of the revived music is cultural, then shouldn't the songs change with a culture in motion?

When the wave of the revival movement reached Salento in the early 1970s, Luigi Chiriatti, a committed researcher and one of the earlier revivalists, asserted that for him "to do research, to share this music is a political and cultural committment" (Chiriatti 2001:11). In a culture that is transforming, the cultural function of the researcher is also to honor tradition and to appreciate it. This tradition embodies decades if not centuries of hardship and suffering. Chiriatti remembers in his book *Opillopillopì Opillopillopà* (1998) that both as a child and as a young man he used to listen to his elders singing songs *alla stisa*, polyvocal songs without instrumental accompaniment. Chiriatti's family was from the lower classes (his father was among those who dug

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the canals that routed "dirty waters" away from the main city; his mother was a peasant). In Chiriatti's recollections, people gathered in the evenings at his parents' house to sing, drink wine, celebrate life, and "exorcize" the economic difficulties of their families (Chiriatti 1998:11-12). From this background Chiriatti formed an intimate understanding of the meaning of the songs and how this music connects to the body of life, with its hardships and joys.

The beginning of his research was difficult. Luigi recalls how much time it took him to travel around the countryside, to find the singers, and to make decent recordings of songs, poems, and laments. The major obstacle was to get people to sing songs related to memories of a difficult past. He writes:

> The informants did not want to remember or bring back to mind moments related to their suffering. It was a culture that was running from itself, and those who (like me) went to resume their own

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> origins were not always welcomed with courtesy and a good predisposition. (1998:21)

The motivations of the earlier revival groups were both cultural and political—the members of the groups were also members of the Communist Party. By choosing a work song or a protest song, the singer also identified himself politically. In Chiriatti's words:

> To sing on stage meant to denounce, through the direct witnessing of the musical production and of the life stories, the culture of suffering and abuse that the peasant and working classes experienced throughout their existence and from which they were running, not wanting to remember because memory opened old and deep wounds. (1998:56)

Despite the first moment of diffidence and resistance, Chiriatti's persistence, integrity, and honesty enabled him to locate the most knowledgeable singers and to start to collect chants and songs. Among

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them, Gli Ucci (The Ucci) a group of two friends, Antonio Bandello and Antonio Aloisi, have contributed to the preservation and interpretation of *pizziche, canti alla stisa, stornelli, canti di questua,* and laments.

Revivalists and the elders perform side by side. Until his death in 1998, Antonio Bandello performed with Aloisi and younger generations of musicians at concerts and festivals. The lessons learned from the traditional musicians are about music and about life. Their music is not separated from life. Their music is their life directly presented. Chiriatti describes his experience with the Zimba, and especially the brothers Uccio and Ciano, this way: "For them, rhythm is life, good and bad. They associate the extraordinary capacity to give life a rhythm to the capacity to laugh at one's self, to not become entangled in destiny, and to react

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to what happens to them with irony and strength" (1998:33).

Among the people involved at the beginning of the revival in Salento was Rina Durante, a writer. Durante was living in Rome during the 1960s where she met Giovanna Marini and others involved with the movement of Italian folk revival that I analyzed earlier in this chapter. Durante had become interested in popular culture a decade earlier, when she first became acquainted with the funeral laments of Salento, anciently influenced by Greek funerary rites.

In the mid 1970s, Durante met Chiriatti, a researcher who knew how to play the tambourine and who came from Calimera, a town in which people speak Griko.[5] This was the beginning of the *Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino*, the result of people previously involved in the recuperation and revival of traditional music.

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Durante, like many other leftist revivalists, believed music and performance to be a tool for political and social awareness. "Our [the revivalists'] work," she wrote, "had to be a political work in a cultural context" (qtd. in Chiriatti 1998:70). Durante financially supported field research and, when dealing with the traditional repertoire, required from researchers seriousness and discipline.

In 1975, the Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino was composed of five people, three men and two women, singing and playing, two guitars, a mandolin, an accordion, and a tambourine.[6] The group soon evolved from being a revival band into a "cultural co-op." This means that the group was not only preoccupied with reviving and performing traditional music, also produced essays on Apulian folklore as well as organized the first conference on Apulian linguistic minorities (Chiriatti 1998:58; and 123). The revival

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groups such as the Nuovo Canzoniere and the Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino performed musically like the Piccoli Teatri (see chapter 1) acted in the theatre: performance walked hand in hand with instruction, and concerts/pieces were as important as seminars, workshops, and conferences on the role of creativity in society, and vice versa. The first album of the band *Canti di terra d'Otranto e della Grecìa salentina* (Songs of Land of Otranto and of Salentine Grecìa) was released in 1977.

When Giovanna Marini visited Salento in the early 1970s she brought with her the political rigor of the NCI and a philosophy that the goal of the folk revival is to communicate and to preserve. In order to accomplish these goals, discipline, attention, and care for the material gathered are fundamental (see Chiriatti 1998:81). Marini's impact on younger generations of researchers was indisputable. She was

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able to translate the modes of oral music into Western musical terms and then explain to trained musicians how to play this traditional music.

Despite Marini's care and high ethical standards, some of the researchers I have interviewed have mixed feelings about her work. Some believe she "stole" music from the region for her own profit by rearranging the songs for her vocal quartet. Beyond personal opinions, however, Marini's work was crucial for local musicians and researchers. She brought to the field her own methodology and a respect for the material, as well as the understanding of artistic work as a cultural and political mission. At the level of musicianship, Marini also carried with her the most innovative aspect of the work of the NCI: the taste and craft of musical rearrangement.

Musical expertise became increasingly more important. Daniele Durante, who played guitar in the

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CGS, admitted that once he began to study classical guitar and then play the traditional songs, people learned to appreciate those songs better and people from the younger generations were more attracted to the music (Chiriatti 1998:95). The idea that traditional music was not sophisticated had limited the audience for this music even as it was being revived. This idea contained a classist prejudice, of course. But at the time, the most important factor was to commercialize the music, to make it more palatable.

Recognition took some time. The life of the Canzoniere Grecanico was difficult at the beginning. In the 1970s a few people in the region were interested in traditional Italian music. Many people were more fascinated by North American and British pop and rock music or political music. Many times, Chiriatti recounts, people did not react well to the repertory of the group. Workers and peasants, whose songs were being

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sung, did not necessarily want to hear folk songs when they had a chance to rest, enjoy a party, or listen to music.

The first concerts were organized in the context of the Communist Party's annual meetings in the mid-1970s. During the summer months, the Communist Party held, and still holds, monthly local festivals. Stands are erected with food and local crafts for sale, and there is usually a designated area for concerts and political speeches. Right at the beginning of their career, the CGS often performed before the political speech of a PC candidate. In the political campaign of 1976, for example, the group performed every time Giorgio Casalino, a candidate from the local Communist Party, spoke (Licci, qtd. in Chiriatti 1998:88). This choice derived from the political view of the members of the Canzoniere for whom:

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> to revive music meant to bring to the people or to the theatres a sample of real life, not only of musical life but also of the social and political life of the "subaltern" class. To be onstage and perform meant to denounce, through the direct experience narrated in the songs, the culture of suffering and abuse that the peasant and working classes had had to endure, and from which they were trying to run away because even the memory hurt. (Chiriatti 1998:56)

In the years 1979-1980 the activities of the Canzoniere were weakened by the national political crisis and by the rupture with the Communist Party. The group broke up and, out of the five people who originally formed the band, only two remained. Despite their strong local roots, the Canzoniere also performed nationally and internationally, reviving songs of the Salentine repertoire in France, Greece, Germany and Holland.

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The Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino was capable of changing over time and adapting its production to the different waves of the revival. During the last years, the group produced several CDs of tarantella music: *Canti e pizziche d'amore* and *Carataranta* (2000), *Pizzica pizzica* (2001), *Alla riva del mare* and *Serenata* (2002), all contain pizzica (the local tarantella music) and songs derived from the ritual of tarantismo.[7]

In the next chapter, I will analyze the work of the "second wave" of revival in Salento, with its references to the revival of tarantella as well as the revival of images and metaphors from the ritual of tarantismo.

ENDNOTES:

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[1] As we can read on Lomax' website, "in the early 1930s, Alan Lomax and his father, pioneering folklorist John A. Lomax, first developed the Library of Congress'

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Archive of American Folksong as a major national resource" (see http://www.alan-lomax.com). Lomax also assembled the first recorded overview of world folksongs for Columbia Records.

[2] Later, in 1959, Nataletti will also support Ernesto De Martino and his team in Salento, providing him with RAI recording equipment (see De Martino 1996:14).

[3] *Resistenza* was an anti-Fascist, anti-Nazi, and later anti-oppressive allies movement that surged all over Italy during World War II.

[4] "Bella Ciao, un programma di canzoni popolari italiane" (Farewell, fair lady: a program of Italian folk songs) was edited by Roberto Leydi, and directed by Filippo Crivelli, with text by Franco Fortini. The performers of *Bella Ciao* were: Caterina Bueno, Maria Teresa Bulciolu, Giovanna Daffini, Sandra Mantovani, Silvia Malagugini, Cati Mattea, Giovanna Marini, Han Roth, Michele L. Straniero, il Gruppo padano di Piàdena, Ivan della Mea, and Gaspare De Lama.

[5] Griko is the language spoken in 13 provinces of Salento. It is a mixture of local dialect and Greek. Salento was once part of the *Magna Graecia*, larger Greece, when ancient Greece colonized Southern Italy

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during the 8th century B.C. Since the beginning of the folk revival movement in Salento, Griko language and traditions were also revived.

[6] The Canzoniere Salentino was composed by Luigi Lezzi, Anna d'Ignazio, Marisa Serafino, and Giuliano Capani and later Bucci Caldarulo, Salvatore Russo, and Mario Polelli.

[7] For more information on the Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino and for a full discography, visit the website: www.canzonieregracanicosalentino.net.

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Chapter 4

The Revival of Salentine Tarantella and Tarantismo

(1990s - 2000s)

In this chapter, I will discuss the second wave of revival in Salento since the early 1990s, focusing particularly on music and dance, and on the discourse of a Salentine identity as it was formulated by local artists and scholars. From around 1989, a new wave of revival flowed from Salento to the rest of Italy and Europe. This revival started with the formation of different groups interested in Salentine music and, especially, in the *pizzica pizzica*, the tarantella danced at social gathering and festivities. The second wave of revival also interested the field of folk dance, as well as cinema, radio, and literature. The

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publication of Franco Cassano's book *Il pensiero meridiano* (1996) ignited an inflamed discourse on the topic of Salentine identity that will be discussed in this chapter.

While many Salentine intellectuals saw in the revival of the 1990s a chance to express philosophical and political thoughts, the folk music revivalist bands such as the Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino, Aramirè, and Zoé, all from Salento, started touring and performing in Italy and Europe. The question of local identity was heartily discussed "at home," while a global interpretation of the ritual was conceptualized in the U.S. Since the late 1980s, the complex ritual of tarantismo traveled across the Atlantic Ocean and began to be performed in New York City by Italian artist Alessandra Belloni, whose work will be analyzed in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

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4.1 The Second Wave of Revival in Salento: Music

After the fairly quiet time of the 1980s, in 1995, scholar and musician Luigi Chiriatti helped organize a festival of traditional music that would involve local bands. The festival, *Salento Altra Musica* (Salento Other Music), took place in the fall of 1996. At the same time, many other local researchers, scholars, and artists became more and more interested in their cultural roots. Many works were published about traditional music, tarantismo, and the relationship between ritual, performance, and local identity. Among them, Angelo Turchini *Morso, morbo morte. La tarantola fra cultura medica e terapia popolare* (Bite, Epidemics, and Death: tarantulas between medical culture and popular therapy), a chapter on tarantismo in Gilbert Rouget's book *La Musique et la Trance* (Music and Trance) (1990), Giorgio Di Lecce's *La danza della piccola taranta. Cronache da Galatina: 1908-1993* (The

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Dance of the Small Tarantula. Chronicle from Galatina: 1908-1993) (1994), the 1996 reprint of Ernesto De Martino's *La terra del rimorso*, Franco Cassano's *Il pensiero meridiano* (Meridian Thought)(1996), Brizzio Montinaro's *San Paolo dei serpenti* (St. Paul of the Snakes)(1996), and the Italian translation from the German of Marius Schneider's *La danza delle spade e la tarantella* (The Dance of Swords and the Tarantella) (1999).

Some of the bands that appeared during the 1990s were *Canzoniere di Terra d'Otranto*, *Aramirè*, *Zoé*, *Ghetonìa*, and *Nidi d'Arac*.[1] Images of the local tarantula (the *Latrodectus Tredicim Guttatus*) were on album covers, book covers, t-shirts, and other gadgets, reinforcing the image of the spider's bite as related to music, and as empowering metaphor.

The postcard that Salentine band Aramirè used for their U.S. tour in 2002, featured an ancient map of

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southern Italy with the drawing of two tarantulas, and the writing: "Aramirè, Musica Salentina" (Aramirè, Salentine Music), and "Pizzica ~ Get Bitten by the Beat" in English (see fig. 4). If, on one side, tarantismo and the healing tarantella used in the ritual constitute a large part of the Salentine social identity, on the other, they are part of a larger repertory of dances and songs.

Fig. 4
Aramirè's U.S. Concert Tour Postcard (2002)

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Despite this, at the time I visited Salento in the summer of 2002, many of the revival groups were sharing a limited repertory that revolved mainly around pizzica pizzica with texts that most often included references to the ritual. One famous pizzica pizzica song is *Santu Paulu*, the best interpretation of which I heard from the band Zoé. Here is the text of "St. Paul":

Santu Paulu meu de le tarante
ca pizziche le caruse
a'mmenzu ll'anche
Santu Paulu meu de li scurzuni
ca pizzichi li carusi alli cuiuni

O mamma comu balla la taranta la pizzicau
la pizzicau allu core mamma mia ci dolore

A ddù te pizzicau la tarantella
de sutta alla putia de la cunnella

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(My St. Paul of the tarante
you bite the women in between their legs
St. Paul of the scorpions
you bite the men in their testicles

Oh mother, look how she dances, the taranta bit her
it bit her in the heart, my mother, how painful

Where did the tarantula bite you?
Under the edge of the skirt)

The folk revival of the 1970s shared some aspects with the one in the 1990s. In both periods, researchers and revivalists were committed to the preservation of the local traditional culture in all its aspects (music, dance, food, and craftwork). However, the movement in the 1990s was generally avoiding connections to political parties, while the earlier revival had been linked to the Communist Party, predominantly.

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The younger generations in Apulia and in southern Italy in general did not feel they had to emigrate. The class system has changed to the point that the migrant tide has turned with immigrations from other countries literally flooding the eastern-southern shores of Italy. The local inhabitants now look at their ethnicity and individual history in a different way, in order to be able to engage in a dialogue with people coming in the country. The 1990s immigrants reached Salento and the South from Africa, the Middle East, India and Asia. As a consequence, the revival of the nineties was marked by a split between those bands that wanted to preserve the forms of traditional local music (called "the purists"), and those who, on the other hand, wanted, in their revival of the local music, to add electronic instruments (mainly double bass and keyboards) to the traditional set of tambourine, accordion, guitar, and violin.

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This second trand—the mixing of the local tradition with other musical traditions, including contemporary dance music such as *techno* and *dub*, as well as *rap* and *reggae*—was not limited to Salento only. The beginning of the 1990s saw a proliferation of Italian rappers, reggae, and hip-hop bands. Salentine band *Sud Sound System*, Neapolitan bands *Bisca 99 Posse* and *Almamegretta*, and Calabrese band *South Posse* have all enganged in a "contamination" of contemporary and folk (see Plastino 1996, and Sciorra 2002).

While the media have often described the work of these bands as a syncretism between the modern and the traditional, the bands did not situate themselves in the context of the folk revival. The confusion was caused by the fact that many of the Southern Italian rap, reggae, and ragamuffin bands did use the elements of local dialect, traditional vocal grain and instruments (sampled or played live), and sometimes song/text quotes

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from folk songs (Plastino 1996:111-116). However, the choice of singing in dialect expressed more a political statement (wanting to speak the "language of the people") than an intention to revive the "traditional."

The work of Apulian band Sud Sound System is particularly meaningful in the context of this dissertation. The first internationally acclaimed band to use Salentine dialect, Sud Sound System were commercially marketed as a Salentine *hip-hop* band, because of the rhythm and the political flavor of its texts. In the 1990s, Salento became known as the "Italian Jamaica," with a romantic and stereotypical view of Jamaica (and Salento) as a "mythic place of awesome beauty, of entertainment and freedom" (Santoro 2001:41).

Musicologist and anthropologist Steven Feld, talking about musical schismogenesis, writes: "music is the most highly stylized of social forms iconically

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linked to the broader cultural production of local identity, and indexically linked to contexts and occasions of community participation" (Feld 1995:107). Sud Sound System embodies this definition by producing music that is locally specific while, at the same time, participating in the market of world beat.

Sud Sound System began their activities in the late 1980s. Their first hit *Fuecu/T'a sciuta bona* (Fire/It Went Fine For You) in 1991 featured Salento's dialect, reggae music, and lyrics about the danger of using hard drugs. The band became very popular and traveled to France, Germany and England.

In 1991, Sud Sound System was invited to participate in a project organized by French sociologist Georges Lapassade (see Plastino 1996). Lapassade brought together members of the band with traditional Salentine musicians, thus creating a collaboration between the new sounds of ragamuffin and the sound of the Salentine

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tarantella pizzica pizzica. Lapassade was interested in the relationship between ragamuffin and pizzica for two reasons: 1. He traced some of the roots of ragamuffin in the Mediterranean; 2. He claimed that the members of Sud Sound Systems were the new tarantati, a new Salentine generation of musicians intricately connected with the musical ritual of tarantismo.

While the implications of Lapassade's intervention in Salento won't be discussed in detail here (the reader can refer to Plastino 1996 for this purpose), it is important to mention that, it was after this intervention that the conflation between social courting tarantella, the pizzica pizzica, and the ritual tarantella, the *pizzica tarantata* began to happen. The genre of Sud Sound System was called *etnorap* (predominantly because of the local specificity expressed by the choice of dialect) and, when tarantella was used, *tarantamuffin*, the conflation of tarantella

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and ragamuffin. Lapassade stretched the comparison between ragamuffin and pizzica tarantata to the extent of comparing the musical contribution of Sud Sound System with the one of Luigi Stifani (Plastino 1996:42), the musician healer whose work I described in chapter 2.

The comparison was based on the social function of the musician, understood as a healer who can induce a cathartic trance. According to Lapassade, Sud Sound System was to the younger Salentine generations what Stiffani was for the tarantate. This broad statement was both contested (Plastino 1996: 61-64) and accepted by the members of the band. Talking about the "sound" of Sud Sound System, Rapper Treble stated:

> It's music as catharsis, and it joins tarantismo's rhythm with the sound of Sud Sound System and our posse. We immagine the sound to be therapeutic, that can help free one's self from internal ills and transmit positiv energy to others. The women who were overcome by the disease took part in the ritual, shaking, and in that way freed

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> themselves from the masculine culture and from the absurd and difficult conditions of agricultural labor. Mix that with a bit of modernity and you have Sud Sound System. (quoted in Pacoda 1996:36-37).

In 1996, Sud Sound System released their first album, *Solidu Comu na Petra* (Solid As a Rock), in which they collaborated with Salentine folk tambourine player Puccia, weaving reggae and pizzica drum rhythms, as in the tune *Afro ragga taranta jazz*. The song opens with this line:

Afro Ragga taranta jazz
punnu su tuttu
damme na base afro raga taranta jazz
se zumpi e traballi poi iti
ca te piace

(Afro Reggae taranta jazz
I can [play] on everything

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give me an afro reggae taranta jazz base
if you jump and shake, you will see,
you will like it)

Tarantella was listed in the lyrics as another style of music on which musicians could rap and improvise, together with reggae and jazz. Salentine writers and cultural activists Vincenzo Santoro and Sergio Torsello credited the band for bringing innovation to Salentine traditions and, for the "ritual function of the concerts and gatherings, and for the mixing of metropolitan cultures with the culture of the peasants (Santoro and Torsello 2002:7). The gatherings Torsello refers to, where musicians played traditional and metropolitan music were the hearth of "a new traditional culture" (7).

Despite the differences between the tarantamuffin movement and the folk revival movement in Salento, they were happening around the same years, and both witnessed

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a revival of the pizzica, often understood as part of a music contamination of the local with the global (predominantly manifested in technology).

Another band experimenting with traditional music and techno music was Nidi d'Arac. Their last album, *Tarantulae* (2001), features original and traditional songs rearranged tambourine, flutes, violin, cello, drum set, synthesizer, and groove box. Alessandro Coppola is the leader of the group. He is originally from Lecce, Salento, but resides in Rome. About *Tarantulae*, he writes:

> *Tarantulae*—its phonetic diction is the same in Latin, Salentine, and English—is not only a CD: it is a new and universal artistic expression which, thanks to its features, typical of modernity, could bring the Mediterranean-Salentine folk tradition to be recognized among the most fascinating and ancient ethnic cultures of the Global Village. (Coppola 2001)

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Alessandro Coppola is a musician interested in Salentine traditional music and, at the same time, interested in innovation. At the core of the musical style of Nidi D'Arac's is the collaboration between Coppola and Marco Viale, who works with synthesizers, and digital elaborations. The band performs in discos and in *centri sociali*, merging the traditional pizzica pizzica with breakbeat, trip hop, and drum & bass.

The experimental work of Antonio Infantino is another example of this musical trend. Born in the town of Tricarico in the region of Basilicata[2], Infantino participated in the early Italian revival movement, working as a musician in Dario Fo's production of *Ci ragiono e canto* (see chapter 1). While directing the revival musical group *I Tarantolati di Tricarico*, Infantino also explores the boundaries between tradition and techno music. His latest release, the CD *TARÁnTRANCE* (2003), contains several tracks in which

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Infantino mixes electronic music and tarantella. The CD jacket states that this CD is "the soundtrack for the perfect spiritual rave by tarantella Guru Antonio Infantino featuring electronica master Eraldo Bernocchi." The tracks are a combination of ternary tambourine rhythms, synthesized violin melodies, vocals by Infantino, who quotes traditional lyrics, such as the chant to St. Paul, and women singing or speaking sentences in Italian and in English such as "I need to dance, I need to trance," or "Let me trance, let me dance."

In the summer of 2003, Infantino created a performance version of *TARÁnTRANCE*, called *TARÁnTRANCE: Techno Cathartic Opera*, and performed it as the closing piece of the festival *Etnic@: Voci, Suoni e Visioni dai Popoli* (Ethnic: Voices, Sounds and Vision from the People) at the 2003 Biennale in Venezia. The performance included music, dance, and visuals, and

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encouraged the audience to participate by dancing the "ancestral" tarantella dance. A press release on the Internet states that: "While dancing, excited by the ancestral dance, by the hypnotic sounds, and by the vibrant colors, one can fall into a Trance, guided by this *hypermedial shaman.*"[3] Interestingly, on another press release (*Il Gazzettino* newspaper of the 18 July 2003), the origins of the cathartic dance tarantella are not related to the tarantismo ritual at all, but to the ancient Etruscan goddess *TARAn*, the goddess of love, beauty, and renewal, invoked to balance "the venoms of everyday life."[4]

Infantino's work is perhaps the first to enter the world of fine arts, architecture, and fashion. The song TARÁnTRANCE is featured on Italian stylist Giorgio Armani's first CD *Emporio Armani's Caffé*, realized and distributed in collaboration with Sony Records, and

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featuring—among others-artists such as Infantino and the Bollywood Brass Band of Bombay.[5]

Other bands, such as Aramirè Compagnia di Musica Salentina (Aramirè, Salentine Music Company), or *Zoé* made other aesthetic and political choices. More interested in the specifics of local music, these bands revive the folk repertory of *canti alla stisa*) polyphonic songs with no musical accompaniment, pizziche (plural of pizzica), love songs, and work songs. Both Aramirè and Officina Zoé use the instruments typical of the Salentine tradition: tambourines, guitar, accordion, violin, and harmonica.

Aramirè's albums are used by younger musicians to learn the songs and to revive them—continuing the phenomenon of a revival of the revival. The band Aramirè itself, born in 1996, was co-directed by researcher and musician Luigi Chiriatti, who was an original member of the 1970s revival group Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino

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(see chapter 3 of this dissertation). Active both in the field of performance and in the education field, members of Aramirè, such as Roberto Raheli, teach Salentine musicology and history of folk music at workshops and seminars. Aramirè is also a publishing house. Among other works, Aramirè published the diary of Luigi Stifani, "the last tarantella musician-healer" of Salento (see chapter 2 of this dissertation; and Stifani 2001).

The group Zoé, like Aramirè, is interested in reviving traditional music and in composing new music with a traditional "flavor." Zoé plays more with metaphors revolving around the tarantata ritual. When, in 2000, the band's album *Sangue Vivo* (Live Blood) was released, writer Felice Liperi wrote about it:

> What immediately strikes the listener are the pieces in which the pizzica explodes in its hypnotic manifestation, predominantly because of the *frenetic* percussion of the drums. A frenzy that

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> excites to dance and to move obsessively, used in the past as a vessel for trance states or even for therapeutic purposes. (Liperi 2000)

The album contains several songs from the tarantata ritual tradition, such as *Don Pizzica*, based on the traditional therapeutic tarantella. Another of Zoé's albums *Terra: canti e danze del Salento* (Earth: songs and dances of Salento), recorded in 1996, contains even more pizzica tunes—six tunes out of 12: *S. Paul* (St. Paul), *Pizzica Tarantata* (Tarantata Pizzica, the most popular tune used for the therapy of tarantismo), *Fimmine Fimmine* (Women Women, a women work song which contains an invocation to St. Paul), *Canuscu na carusa* (I know a girl, another tarantella), and *Pizzicarella* (Pizzicarella is the name of a woman, a love song based on a tarantella).

The bridge between the tarantata ritual and the musical performance of the tarantella is obtained

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through a repertory of metaphors, the strongest of which are: *the bite* (the "Get bitten by the Beat" we read in Aramirè's concert card, for example); and *blood metaphors* like the one extracted from the jacket of Zoé's CD, *Sangue Vivo* (Live Blood):

> Live Blood is the blood that runs with the obsessive tambourine rhythm that, for centuries, has been used in Salento, in the extreme South-East of Italy. It [the rhythm] has been used to tame the obscure and painful force that some people of this region have in their blood. To give it [the force] a sound, a voice, and some dance steps, so that it may hurt less. Pain does not go away, but for them, as long as the music lasts, it seems possible to forgive life.

Also, when I was in Salento in 2001, I often heard musicians say that they knew how to play traditional Salentine music better than anyone else, especially the ritual pizzica, because they have this music "in their blood."

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Blood metaphors may originate in the symbolism of tarantismo system, in which the spider's venom circulates in the blood. Blood as the site for the spreading of disease, the casting of spells, and the possibility of healing is not specific to tarantismo, but part of a larger Italian folk medicine system of beliefs (Del Giudice 2001). Blood is also part of the musical performance of tarantella because, when playing the tambourine for several hours, the friction of the hand on the goatskin causes the musician's hand to bleed often resulting in blood stains on the white skin of the drum.

These bands, Sud Sound System, Nidi D'Arac, Zoé, and Aramirè, are exemplary of the main trends present in the "second wave" of the Salentine revival movement. Despite the differences and how committed the bands are to the preservation of traditional music, they share the heritage of the pizzica, the dance of the spider, and

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all three made their local and national success partially because of it.

4.2 Dance

According to the Italian ethnochoreologist[6] Pino Gala, the Italian folk dance revival did not really happen until the late 1970s and early 1980s (Gala 2002:129; and 132). This revival came even later to Salento. Only during the last ten years or so has there been an increasing interest in the tarantella dance in the Salento region in particular, and in Italy at large. The earlier interest in the tarantella ritual laid the groundwork for the second wave of revival that included a dance revival with it.

On one side, the new music groups that were playing with different styles and traditions, such as the example of Sud Sound System, allowed the development of a new tarantella dance that freely interpreted forms

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from various sources. This new dancing might use some traditional figures, such as the movement of the arms and the interplay between two dancers, and add to those movements that were not strictly part of the local tarantella. Some of the added movements are spinning in place, "flamenco-like" motions of the hands, shoulders, and head, and large skips that display agility but lack the subtlety of the traditional dance form.

Working against this development of new "fusion" forms were various cultural associations, non-profits, in Torrepaduli, such as Novaracne "Center for Mediterranean Culture and for the Divulgation of Popular [Folk] Traditions." The goal of non-profits such as Novaracne is to preserve traditional forms of dance by organizing seminars and workshops, publishing books, releasing CDs of traditional music, and actively participating in the life of the local community.

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I met one of the two founders of Novaracne, Ada Metafune, in Galatina in the summer of 2002. Ada was teaching a pizzica-pizzica workshop that I had come to attend. Her teaching style was extremely simple and yet quite detailed. She introduced the dance with a lot of historical and sociological information, giving the participants an understanding of the social symbolism contained in the tarantella. She also invited her mother Sabina, in her 1980s, to dance with her and show the students how the older women danced.

Biagio, Ada's husband, is Novaracne's other president. He builds tambourines and other percussion instruments for local bands, including Canzoniere Grecanico Salentine, Aramirè, and Zoé, sells CDs of traditional music, books and videotapes about Salento, tarantella, and tarantismo, and with Metafune, organizes local music festivals, and dance workshops in which Metafune teaches the pizzica.

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From Ada I learnt that there are three forms of pizzica: pizzica tarantata, pizzica scherma, and pizzica pizzica. Pizzica tarantata is the tarantella danced by the women bitten by the spiders. It is the trance dance that they perform during the ritual. Many scholars and the elders hesitate to call the healing choreographies "a dance" because, they believe they are not choreographed or rehearsed. On the other hand, I argue that they are learned over time through observation and cultural transmission and, this sense, are choreographed. During the last ten years, moreover, as the festivals arose, radio programs broadcast the music, and the tarantismo ritual was staged by filmmakers and theatre companies, the ritual movements of the tarantata were stylized.

I have witnessed the staged performance of the tarantata ritual several times: in New York City, where Italian dancer, singer, musician, and director

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Alessandra Belloni gives periodical workshops of pizzica healing dance, and performs the ritual on stage during her concerts; and in Torrepaduli (Salento), where Ada Metafune performs the ritual for herself whenever "she feels she needs it." Although she doesn't teach the ritual, Metafune was available to me to talk about her experience with the ritual, and generously showed me a videotape of the ritual as she performed it in her house with a group of local musicians (a tambourine player, a violin player, and an accordion player).

While I was in Torrepaduli interviewing Ada Metafune and Biagio, I also witnessed the *pizzica scherma*, the second form of pizzica. Pizzica scherma is a knife dance/combat performed until very recently only by a male-male couple. Ada Metafune is one of the rare women accepted in the duel. The music for the *ronda* (the circle of people around the dancers) of the pizzica scherma is also a tarantella. The drum performs the

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ternary patterns of 6/8 and the accordion or the harmonica play the traditional melodies, also heard in the other forms of pizzica. Originally there were no lyrics to the tarantellas of the pizzica scherma, but today younger people play and sing in the ronda.[7]

On the night between the 15 and the 16 of August, in the town of Torre Paduli, in the far southern end of Salento, the feast of S. Rocco is celebrated. That same night, vendors, peasants, and artisans begin to set up for a regional fair that will begin the following morning and continue from dawn till the late afternoon. Originally, after the celebrations of S. Rocco ended around midnight of the 15 August, the vendors themselves, mainly of gipsy origins, residents in Salento or traveling from the rest of Southern Italy or Albania for this fair, danced the pizzica scherma. At one time, the dance was performed with real knives. Sometimes, also, they would settle family or business

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affairs through the use of the knives by fighting under the cover of a dance. There are old popular stories of how blood was shed right in front of the church of St. Rocco. Today real knives are not used but the dance still contains a set of hand gestures with a particular significance such as "move forward," "step back," "move aside," and the attack strike, performed as if the dancers had real knives and were trying to stab the rival (see fig. 5)

Fig. 5
Pizzica Scherma, Torrepaduli 2002
(Source: Laura Biagi)

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The levels of participation in this form of ritual dance have varied in the last years. As Pino Gala writes: "the number of the *schermidori* [the men who practice the knife/sword dance] was limited in the early 1980s; it then increased in the late 1980s, to decrease again in the 1990s" (Gala 2002:114). What I witnessed in Torre Paduli in the August of 2002, were a series of ronda(s) with different dancers challenging each other to a symbolic dance duel. The number of professional schermidori was around ten. There were no accidents or feelings of threat. Playfulness was the main element in the dance.

However, the dance itself is very seriously performed. It is a duel and not the representation of one. The two dancers walk around the circumference of the ronda looking at each other and reading the language of the rival's body. Then one or the other would make an attack move, by stepping forward, aiming at the rival

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with his fingers-knife. The duel ends when one of the two is able to strike the other or when one of the two becomes too aggressive and the couple if forced to stop the dance. Then, the dancer who is left in the ronda makes eye contact with another dancer or calls his name, or another dancer spontaneously enters the ronda and a new cycle begins.

Despite the fact that the pizzica scherma is not apparently related to tarantismo, people in the region of Salento associate these two ritual forms as belonging to the same heritage, the heritage of Salentine folk traditions. Moreover, the tambourine and the ronda are present in both forms and there is an element of the combat in tarantismo, when the tarantata is chasing the spider, trying to kill it by stepping on it.

The festival of St. Rocco and its related pizzica scherma are moreover facing the same dilemma that the tarantata ritual is facing: with economic and social

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transformation, the festival and its ritual dance is changing, to the point that some scholars forecast its disappearance. In an article she wrote in August 2003 in a local newspaper, Metafune describes her relationship to the feast of S. Rocco as such:

> I made a metaphorical link between the S. Rocco festival and a son [Metafune has a son and a daughter]: you can support his growth with examples, and you can help that he develops to be strong and healthy. You also hope that he becomes independent and free to choose for himself, a person who is critically sensitive to change. Because everything changes but nothing is destroyed. (Metafune 2003)

The ronda and the tambourine playing the tarantella are also present in the pizzica-pizzica (hereafter referred to simply as "pizzica"), a social dance performed at social gathering such as marriages, festivities, festivals, and concerts. Pizzica was

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originally one of the social dances of peasants in Salento. Pizzica was almost abandoned for forty years, just after the end of World War II but was revived in the early 1990s. While there were some people who never stopped dancing it, generally, the form was replaced by dances such as the waltz, polkas, mazurkas, tangos, fox trots, or, for the younger generations of the 1960s, by rock and roll (Gala 2002:111-114).

Traditionally, pizzica is danced by two persons at a time, surrounded by a circle of people forming the ronda. The dance is a playful courting and flirtatious dance. Traditionally danced by a woman with a woman, or a woman with a man, pizzica is nowadays performed by a man and a man, too, but usually these couples are not from the region and do not know the traditional steps of the dance. When I have seen two men dance together they were young, a bit drunk, and were dancing to the music

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of pizzica with steps that looked more like a free improvised dance.

The revival brought tarantella on stage where the musicians and dancers performed together. The staging of the music and dance resulted in a physical distance between the performers and the audience. This is the opposite of what happens in the ronda, where the dancers are surrounded by the musicians and by other people that can, when their turn comes, go to the center of the circle and dance. In the ronda the roles of the dancers and the audience rotate. During a concert or a performance, instead, many people in the audience dance alone facing the stage as they would at a rock or pop concert.

Many other people, however, still form the ronda and dance in a circle. Even on these occasions, many couples dance at the same time and the meaning of the ronda—to create a social space that people can enter to

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be acknowledged, display their virtuosity and beauty, and perform the courting body—is transformed. The ronda becomes very like a disco dance instead of a sacred or courtship dance. People for whom the display of traditional gender roles is limiting and suffocating, welcome the new forms of pizzica with delight and a sense of freedom. Tradition is readapted to the new social conditions of the region, in which the youth are no longer expected to behave according to certain social norms marking the clear distinctions between genders and their roles.

When I went to the concert of Zoé in a town near Leuca, on the 14th of August 2002, I noticed that the audience was listening to a contemporary rock-style band on stage (with major amplification, lights, and elevated stage), performing a selection of folk songs rearranged for a new set of amplified instruments. The separation between the musicians and the audience, and between the

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musicians and the ronda, changed the relationship between people and tradition, and signaled an entirely new kind of experience. Among the audience, some people danced in couples and some people danced alone. The ronda included many couples and individual dancers who performed in front right below the stage, almost becoming part of the concert performance. In that sense, the musicians were part of this new circle, formed on one side by the watching and listening audience, and on the other by the musicians. In the middle were people dancing.

Of course, the separation between the musicians and the people is still there and musicians know it. If one compares videos of the elders performing and videos of a performance like Zoé's, one notices a difference in the body language of the musicians. The elders very rarely would close their eyes when performing or use a body language that expresses closure or separation—by, for

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example, shrinking the shoulders, turning away from the audience, or closing the eyes. On the other hand, the musicians and dancers at Zoé's were very aware of their role as artists and greatly enjoyed their presence on stage. They had their eyes closed, moved to the music with movements that were larger than usual, and sometimes even turned their backs to the audience.

Pino Gala made a list of the non-traditional variations of pizzica: *pizzica de core*, a form in which the flirtatious elements of the dance are predominant; *slow-pizzica*, danced more slowly than the regular form; *trance-pizzica*, a pizzica that includes movements and gestures taken from the ritual of tarantismo as well as from other forms of trance performance, such as spinning and falling on the floor; *energico-pizzica*, a very energetic interpretation of the dance, in which steps are enlarged and wide turns made; *techno-pizzica*, music danced in discos or rave parties in which the tambourine

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rhythm might be overlapped with techno music (Gala 2002:136-142).

What makes Gala's definitions particularly interesting is his use of English words to define the traditional Italian pizzica. His choice is meaningful because these new-traditional dances are hybrids deriving from the impact of U.S. and British pop music and dance on Italian culture since the 1960s.

While all these forms enjoyed some popularity inside and outside the region of Salento, the pizzica de core and the trance-pizzica have been the most predominant in the last few years and will probably remain the strongest in the future years. However, since the 1990s, there has been a melting of the pizzica de core and the trance pizzica, from which has emerged a new form of tarantella that contains steps from the courtship dance and from the tarantata ritual. It is fairly common to see couples dance in the town squares

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displaying the traditional steps with new elements such as spinning.

This "modernization" of the dance form is perceived as beautiful and exciting to the people who do not know the meaning of the traditional form, who read the language behind each small step of the older pizzica as "boring" or "not agile" enough. New generations are more excited about physical displays of strength, and individual addition to the tradition. Individual inputs in the form may create an interrupted communication between the couple of dancers because, when one dancer is spinning, for example, and it is usually the woman who spins, the man has to wait for her individual performance to end. He would do that by still dancing around her, alone.

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4.3 Tarantismo and Neo-Tarantismo

Edoardo Winspeare—a filmmaker from Salento, who in 1993 gained national attention with the film *Pizzicata*—was one of the earliest promoters of the second wave of the Salento revival. He helped organize many parties in the region where bands played traditional music as people shared food, wine and dancing. The motivation behind the parties was a political one. As Winspeare recalls:

> With this choice [the parties] we made a "political" gesture, because we did want to change the idea about our land that we had inherited until that time. So we threw those parties,[8] a lot of them—about 200 between 1992 and 1994, out of which 30 were of grand style—in Depressa, Novaglie, Casarano, Muro, Novoli, Tricase. We involved people from the *Centri Sociali*[9], all the generations and the classes: there were no differences during the "Time of the Feast." The idea was to move the ground from under the earth,

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to make a revolution. (qtd. in Santoro and Torsello 2002:172)

When in 1996, *Pizzicata*, Edoardo Winspeare's movie was released, it became a manifesto for the young revival movement. It was almost treated as a documentary rather than a fiction film, becoming another "bible" together with Ernesto De Martino's book *La terra del rimorso.*

In the film, a World War II American bomber is shot down over the Salentine peninsula. The only survivor is Toni Morciano, the son of local Apulian emigrants. A widowed father and his three daughters find him barely alive and take him back to their farm where they hide him from the authorities. They nurse him back to health.

Recovered, Toni passes himself off as a distant cousin and immerses himself in the local traditions, discovering a culture and an identity that had been lost to him in America. At a town celebration, Toni learns

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the pizzica from Cosima, one of the daughters of the man who sheltered him. To the strains of the sensual and romantic music, they fall in love. But Cosima has another admirer, the spoiled son of the wealthiest farmer in the area. Jealous, this second admirer kills Toni. Driven mad, the following day Cosima becomes a tarantata.

The scene of the pizzica dance and the one in which Cosima and Toni witness a tarantella healing ritual became new "originals" (Santoro and Torsello 2002:8). Cosima's youth and beauty, however, added an element to the ritual that was unprecedented: it was at this time that the image of Salentine musicians and Salentine tarantata women entered the realm of artistic aesthetics. It was not enough that these artists-ritualists were "authentic" (however one might define that troubled word), but that their work as well as their stage and studio presence had to satisfy the needs

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of the world music industry. Concerning this, Winspeare commented:

> I wanted to find, in musicians and dancers, a quality of work, and an aesthetic quality, too. I wanted people that were "beautiful," fascinating, [and] popular (…), to make the communication with the youth more effective. (qtd. in Santoro and Torsello 2002:8)

This construction of what constitutes the best performance of a possession ritual - a construction that intricately merges possession, beauty, "passion," and youth—became fairly widespread among the youth Winspeare refers to in his quote. The cult(ural) link between youth, passion, play, and performance were at the core of revival in the 1990s, and revolved around the pizzica which, with its polyvalent name (pizzica is the name for the ritual dance, for the courtship dance, and for the music), began to always embody the three, indistinctively. So, when playing a pizzica, even if on

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stage and outside a ritual setting, musicians feel they are participating in a ritual, and so does the audience, dancing at the concert. The music doesn't even need to be played live: a CD can help conjure the "power of the pizzica" as well.

However, even though certain elements of the ritual are present in the revived music and dance, these are not always considered healing. The difference is behind the intent of the musicians and of the dancers. Certain bands, such as Aramirè, prefer the audience to make the distinction between dancing a pizzica during a festive evening, and the ritual tarantella. Others, like Ghetonìa in Salento or Alessandra Belloni in New York City, prefer to make the connection between the staged pizzica and the tarantata ritual by bringing a dancer on stage, and staging the ritual. The staging of the ritual becomes a feature in the concert, adding, in a sense, to the program. The staged ritual is usually performed by

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women and contains the elements of the tarantata ritual: the women are dressed in white, they put a white sheet on the floor with some images of St. Paul, and after dancing a tarantella, they start to feel the bite, by performing a trance state.

Then the ritual, as it was analyzed by the main anthropologists and historians such as Ernesto De Martino, develops in three main stages: the dance of the tarantata as the spider, on the floor, shaking her pelvis and head; the dance of the woman around the sheet, her combat to kill the spider; and, finally, her fall on the sheet. After the fall, differently from what happens in the ritual, the performer would leave the stage or would be followed by another woman, who is now the new tarantata performing her staged ritual dance.

Sometimes, the staged dance of the tarantata is not on the floor, such as in the concerts of Neapolitan musician Eugenio Bennato and his band *Taranta Power.*

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Founded in 1998, Taranta Power is a group of people interested in tarantella (from the Neapolitan region as well as from Salento), and in other southern Italian folk music and dances. "Taranta Power is a cultural movement, and not a simple musical band," writes Bennato on his website.[10] The group is investing in the marketing of tarantella, supported by world-music style rhetoric. From the website:

> The Universe [of the tarantella] finds its roots in the same source that feeds Flamenco, Fado, Greek rhythms, and certain sound from North Africa and the near East. Taranta Power wants to propagate Tarantella in Italy and in the whole World.

I saw Bennato and Taranta Power in concert in Scalea, a town in Calabria, in the summer of 2000. This was the first time I saw a performer "performing a tarantella trance." The ritual was not staged. The dancer came on stage each time a tarantella was played

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and performed the same moves: spinning, shaking of the head, and some pizzica steps from the Salentine social courting dance. When the tarantella was over, the woman would leave the stage to come back for the next tarantella.

The woman was very young, with long, blond hair. Her performance was entertaining—the woman was agile, sexy, and moving wildly—and in tune with the 1990s reinterpretation of the ritual as a "contemporary trance," a wild, passionate, and erotic female dance. For people who don't know the ritual of tarantismo, or who have not seen old documentaries or pictures of the ritual, the performance of the tarantata on stage (a display of to female physical beauty, youth, and sensuality) can be fascinating, exciting, and even inspiring. For people who know the ritual, however, its revival lacks the details of, understanding in, and

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sometimes respect for the form as it was practiced traditionally.

I learned that, in this second wave of revival, the tarantata ritual was understood as an erotic and empowering practice, and that it had been stripped, literally, from the Christian sense of shame and suffering it had in the traditional ritual. Of course, cultures change and so do their mythologies that adapt themselves to the facets of the new realities they live in. The question is whether or not tarantismo and the tarantella can survive what is happening now under the rubric of what has been called "neo-tarantismo." (Nacci 2001:9-24)

Neo-tarantismo and the "original" or "authentic" tarantismo share ritual symbols, music, and choreographies but those performing the neo brand of the ritual do not necessarily follow the practices or have the experience of traditional tarantate. Some of the new

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elements are: the women who experienced the bite, for example, do not necessarily come from the lower classes or from the area; their experience of the ritual has happened mainly intellectually, through the reading of key texts such as Ernesto De Martino's; their "cure" happens privately or publicly before an audience who is paying to watch them perform; they get paid for their performance, making a career of tarantismo; the staged performance of a trance, as I have witnessed it, is based on cultural constructs of agility, beauty, sexuality, and eroticism (the performers are usually young, sexy, healthy-looking women), therefore marking a division between the audience and the performers with the implication that the cure can be obtained by whoever is agile (i.e. young) enough to dance tarantella wildly.

Many people, aficionados of popular culture, radio personalities, festival sponsors, spectators, collapse the worlds of meaning of pizzica and tarantismo into one

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larger reality which relies on assumptions of universality: trance and possession are the same wherever they occur, in whatever local culture, as long as they induce an alteration of consciousness; music that comes from rituals can bring to people who merely listen experiences that are related to the "authentic" rituals; the music and dance of the rituals of spirit possession and trance across the world can be reduced to a set of rhythms, movements, sensations, and gestures that can be available to all people; the ultimate goal of spirit possession and trance rituals is always and everywhere the same: to liberate the individual while making her part of a community. Some of the answers to why the tarantella is so captivating to young audiences (11 to 20 years old) were: "it's a liberating dance; it makes go into a trance;" "I feel alive, it comes from the earth; I feel like I belong somewhere;" "it makes me

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feel good, it opens my heart to the world." (Nacci 2001:18-19)

I believe that it can be empowering to embody a tarantata, or to "get bitten by the beat," dancing the pizzica for hours in a sweaty hot disco. While in Rome and in Salento, I have experienced the invigorating feelings of going beyond my physical limits and keep dancing until I was exhausted. I remember the tempting and languid desire to feel tarantata, to go to Galatina dressed in white, to ask St. Paul for a grace, to sit in his chapel and pray, to find personal meaning in the ritual, and to reconnect to my severed Southern Italian roots.

I am aware of how, despite how tempting it is to believe that a local experience can be understood equally worldwide, difference and detail are lost in the process of universalizing. This also pertains to the revival of tarantismo. Most of the "performances of the

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ritual performance" play vaguely around the myth of a spider's bite and the musical therapy. The performers "perform being healed" and this introduces both aesthetic and commercial implications that were not previously there so strongly. In addition, the tarantella is now seen as a process related closely to other Mediterranean rituals involving dance, spirit possession, or trance. The whole phenomenon is presented on the global stage as one of "the healing arts," riding the new age tendency to flatten the peculiarities of different ritual practices.

The phrase neo-tarantismo contains all of the paradoxes of this movement: it is a new contemporary phenomenon, *neo*, but its roots are ancient, *tarantismo*. The larger paradox is that while many people come to neo-tarantismo hoping to find a sense of identity among the "oppressions, sufferance, anxiety and depression" of metropolitan life, to recover a sense of belonging, and

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to protest against the flattening of global culture, they are, at the same time, playing the game of global culture. Their very participation in neo-tarantismo is based on generalizations concerning ritual, music, dance, and spirituality. The Italian sociologist Piero Fumarola states that the construction of a "tribalized identity" is one of the consequences of globalization. "Identity is a social construction," he states, "both at the personal and at the ethnic levels. What happens with globalization? Collective identities are forgotten, they disappear, while tribalized identities are created." (Nacci 2001:54)

Tribalized identities, Fumarola continues, are the cause of the internal dissidences between groups, associations, researchers, and scholars about who is the best repository of traditional culture, who was the first band to start the revival, who has written the

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most important articles, who is the most innovative or the most traditional of the interpreters, and so on.

The revival, both in music and dance, maintains a connection with the concept of *belonging*: while in the 1960s and 1970s belonging meant to belong to a political ideology, today belonging is a sense of belonging to a community (the local community, the performance community, the "tribalized community," and so on). The community of the pizzica and tarantismo devotees lies in between two models of community: on the one side, the more traditional community, defined and confined by locality and familial bonds; and, on the other by the more recent virtual communities, that can transcend space, time, ethnic relations, sexual, religious, and political orientations.

The people who gravitate to Salento and its traditions are a mix of people who are local, people who are not local but who moved there, people who are local

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but moved somewhere else, and people who are not local and who do not live in Salento. During the last three years, web-based communities were born on line. One of them is *Tarantismo*, a web group that is part of MSN Groups and on which the members can exchange pictures, articles, and information on anything related to pizzica and tarantismo, as well as having access to emails of other people interested and having access to a chat line.[11]

According to Pino Gala, what attracts people to tarantella and tarantismo is: "the search for a new existential dimension that can denounce the anxiety and lack of satisfaction of the present times" (Gala 2002:144-145). This is the answer of the moment to what Gala calls the "the search for a new existential dimension" and to what Ernesto De Martino called, in 1959, *la crisi della presenza*, the "crisis of one's presence." Whatever one calls this phenomenon, people

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are searching for an individual connection to their roots and, at the same time, to a belonging to a community, defined in this case, by music, dance, and ritual. Even when the ritual is not staged, the renewed interest in the local music, dance, and ritual for whatever purposes (pop entertainment or healing, for example) constitutes, for most people in the region today, a marker of identity (Santoro and Torsello 2002:9-10).

The Southern Mediterranean region and the Middle East are geographic areas whose history has been written and re-written by migrations, occupation, and colonization marked by many layers of cultural, musical, and religious difference. Some cultural and political changes happened over centuries, others over decades. When traveling to Salento today, one can barely imagine this past of hardship and struggle. It is easier to travel to ancient times, imagining a

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mythic Greek ancestry as one sits on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, looking towards Albania and Greece. But the fact is, that starting in the 1990s, the immigrants came to Apulia from the Balkans. Hundreds of boats carried refugees who arrived, hoping to start their lives anew; not only from the Balkans, but from North and Central Africa, China, India, Pakistan and Eastern Europe, too. With such a complex history and present experience, Apulia looks out into this new millennium with a renewed sense of self.

Franco Cassano is the philosopher who elaborated the concept of a *pensiero meridiano*, a Meridian thought meant as a Southern thought, a new way of thinking one's identity, beyond the cultural and political manipulations of capitalism and its media. The Meridian thought is independent thought based in the experience of the South. It requires that the experience of living in the south leads to the creation of a new set of

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beliefs and a new approach to tradition as not something to be ashamed of but as a personal anchor (see Cassano 1996). In this respect, Meridian thought supports a way of being and thinking peculiar to the different populations of Southern Italy situating these in the larger context of Mediterranean cultures and migration flows. Cassano writes:

> The return of a tradition, in its aggressive and closed form, is a defensive act against the force of dominant culture; the will to declare values that are different from those imposed by the Western take over of the world. (…) But one can also find that tradition is not an idea that can be sold by auction, that the pride of belonging is not only a disease that separates men, but also a care and attention for those sites that for a long time we walked on carelessly, each one of us entrapped in the loneliness of our running. (Cassano 2002:16-17)

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Noting that the creation and recovery of a community, or of a sense of it, is one of the most important aspects of the revival of a tradition, Cassano juxtaposes the healing potential of social bonding to what he calls the "loneliness of the global citizen" (17). Within this way of thinking, getting together to dance, eat, talk, and sing are activities that heal people, because they provide us with a public moment of sharing that validates their being alive and present at this time in this place.

Cassano, while limiting his discourse to the local reality to which he belongs, to a specific local community, opens his parameters theoretically to the larger community of humans: "to understand this need for bonding, to use it without letting the circle close on itself, to keep it open, to let it experience a plural universe, means succeeding in seeing, in the history of

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a border land, the reflection of a universal need" (Cassano 2002:18).

The relationship between staying and leaving, between preserving and evolving is a key concept here. Meridian thought is a bridge between North and South, East and West. Cassano's argument on one side is a manifesto for the preservation of the uniqueness of Salento in the face of global cultural flattening and, on the other, the understanding that music and dance, and in this case pizzica, is prone to syncretism: it will be mixed with other rhythms and dances, in a pollination of styles and beats. He writes:

> The *tamtam* in the pizzica sends messages to and waits for answers from far away drums, it looks for a comparison, it allows encounters, it helps to share the need that is not only peculiar to the one hundred small towns of Salento. (Cassano 2002:20).

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However positive this sounds, one needs to be careful about Cassano's romantic idea of the South. His rhetoric contains cultural assumptions about third world cultures and world music and dance. Despite the fact that what he says is often shared by many musicians and artists and that it is, to some degree, very valuable to the people of the region given the location of Salento and its history of migrations and cultural exchange, his remains an understanding of music and ritual that seems to be coming from a world music approach to tradition. In this sense, pizzica becomes the original music that can now re-appropriate the stereotypes it was given—a wild dance, primal, ritualistic, sensual, sexual, liberating—and bond with other "primitive" musical and ritual forms.

If on the one side the capitalistic and colonial understanding of folk music was re-appropriated by local musicians, artists, and thinkers, on the other the risks

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is that these very musicians might appropriate other cultural forms, justifying their thefts by asserting that they all belong to the South of the world. Still, many are the forms of intercultural exchange that pizzica allows, many the rhythms it can bond with and many the philosophical and spiritual connections it can make across oceans and seas.

Cassano's enunciation of Meridian Thought became a kind of manifesto. A discourse around Salentine identity became an integral part of the second wave of revival to the extent that parts of its text were used by politicians such as Sergio Blasi (the current mayor of the town of Melpignano) to promote cultural events such as the music festival, *La notte della taranta* (The Night of the Tarantula). Started in 1998, this festival takes place every summer with an attendance of 30,000 people (see Torsello and Blasi 2002). The goal of this festival was, according to one of its organizers, Mario Blasi,

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"to let the Salentine traditional music and its rhythmic specificity meet the musical experiences that marked the history of contemporary music" (Torsello and Blasi 2002:14-15). To accomplish this larger purpose, La Notte della Taranta also included a weeklong workshop during which a foreign composer would meet local musicians and create a repertory for the final concert of the festival. Foreign, in the context of this festival, meant foreign to Salento.

In 1998 the "foreign" composer was Neapolitan flute player Daniele Sepe, whose music is a mix of traditional, rock, and jazz. In 1999 and again in 2001, Piero Milesi, originally from Milan, was the director of the festival. In 2000, Joe Zawinul, Weather Report's Austrian-American leader, was the director of the festival leading to subtitling the festival: "Voices and sounds of minorities." In 2001 the director was Vittorio Cosma with special guest, Noa from Israel who sang

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Salentine songs with an original arrangement. *Salentinità*, Salentine identity, soon became an ideology, commercially exploitable even as it was politically ambiguous. Luigi Chiriatti defined it as "an ethnicity largely characterized by the obsessive rhythm of the pizzica-pizzica" (Chiriatti 1998:50).

The construction of a Salentine identity may be an empowering tool for the local population whose history was marked by colonization and oppression, and by a lack of opportunity for the people to organize themselves. However, more often than not, it is used by local political and cultural figures to attract tourists and to justify tourism to the local population. Lorenzo Ria, for example, the president of the province of Lecce which includes all of the small towns of Salento, wrote in 2002:

> The ones who search for our land, are not looking for simple and pure entertainment, or for a fast and consumerist stay. They look for an offer of

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> quality: environment, agrarian landscapes, hospitality, history, monuments, gastronomy, art and culture, but not in a generic and non-differentiated fashion. They want to taste and dive into what Salento can offer as unique and irresistible. They search for and want our identity. (qtd. in Torsello and Blasi 2002:5).

When I was in Salento in the summer of 2002, however, Luigi Chiriatti seemed unhappy about this type of publicity, which makes the Salentine population "disposable" for the tourist. While Salento is marketed as a mythic and sensuous place to visit, and the Salentine as passionate and musical people, the reality of that the local live in is quite different. Chiriatti took me to Porto Cesario, a beautiful seashore on the Adriatic Sea. He pointed to some trees: "Do you see those trees? Under them there is a prehistoric cave with paintings of a dancing god." I was amazed by the beauty of the site. "This is one of the most famous sites that

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people in Salento and abroad visit." He continued. "Now, a multimillionaire enterprise is trying to convince the local politicians to sell the land to build houses on it." Chiriatti's eyes, as blue and bright as the sea, showed sadness and anger. In the midst of the pizzica craze, the summer of 2002, local population is given messages about the appeals of Salentine identity, while being confronted with issues such as property speculating, which are only at the heart of the people living in and caring for Salento and its traditions. In the spring of 2004, Edoardo Winspeare founded *Coppula Tisa*, an association in the Salentine town of Depressa, whose mission is to raise money to buy buildings that are born out of speculation. After buying the building, the association destroys them, in the attempt to restore the natural beauty of the sights. Starting with a sum of 200,000 euros, *Coppula Tisa* welcomes donations as low as one euro.[12]

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ENDNOTES:

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[1] For a comprehensive list of revival bands active in Salento in the 1990s, see Chiriatti (1998:115-133).

[2] The region of Basilicata is on western border of the region of Apulia.

[3] Article retrieved on-line on February 20, 2004 at: www.labiennale.org/it/arti-visive/news/giu03/27-06.html

[4] I retrieved on-line: www.mediaculture.it/Stampa%20tarantrance.htm

[5] From the on-line article "Musica Griffata Armani" (Music signed by Armani) in *L'Espresso*, 26 June 2003. Retrieved on-line: www.mediaculture.it/Stampa%20tarantrance.htm

[6] Ethnochoreology is a title that dance researcher and practitioner Pino Gala invented to describe the in depth study of ethnic dance forms and figures.

[7] For more information on the *pizzica scherma*, see Tarantino (2001).

[8] It is interesting how Winspeare calls these moments of gathering *feste*, which in Italian means both "party" and "feast," "festival" used for the celebrations of patron saints in Southern Italy.

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[9] *Centri Sociali,* social centers, are independent organizations. Their base is usually a vacant building that has been occupied. *Centri Sociali* offer classes, concerts, conferences, and other cultural and political events. The political approach is a leftist or an anarchist one. Many of the most experimental music bands, as well as the most traditional ones, play at the centers.

[10] www.tarantapower.it

[11] The URL for this group is: www.groups.msn.com/tarantismo; to join the group, one can send an email to tarantismo@groups.msn.com.

[12] Contributions are made through the Banca Popolare Pugliese (Pupular Apulian Bank). For more information, visit www.buonpernoi.it/ViewDoc.asp?ArticleID=3156

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Chapter 5

Spiders in the Big Apple:

The Revival of Tarantismo in New York City

(1980s to the Present)

In this final chapter, I am dealing with the spreading of tarantella and tarantismo in the United States, predominantly through the revival work of Italian artist Alessandra Belloni in New York City and her follower students. Given the breadth of Belloni's work, I will focus my analysis on the artist's interpretation of the tarantata ritual. I will analyze Belloni's ritual "art" staging during a concert, and her healing "ritual" staging during one of her healing workshop based on the artist's interpretation of tarantismo.

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Alessandra Belloni is a singer, percussionist, dancer, actress, and director. She is an Artist in Residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, and the Artistic Director and co-founder of *I Giullari di Piazza* (The Jesters of the Square), a theatre and music group dedicated to the revival of traditional Italian music, dance and popular theatre, including *Commedia dell'Arte* style performance pieces.

I met Alessandra Belloni in New York City in the spring of 2000, when I took a tambourine class with her in her studio in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Around this time, I began to research the work of Belloni in the U.S. and learned that Belloni was performing the ritual of tarantismo on stage during her concerts, and that she was also leading healing workshops that were based on the ritual of tarantismo, making extensive use of spiders' bites and webs as

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metaphors for women's diseases, domestic and sexual abuse, spiritual entrapment, and/or sexual repression.

I met Belloni again in the fall of 2002 in upstate New York. At that time I was featuring Italian traditional songs in my performances and concerts and Belloni asked me to collaborate with her theatre and music troupe *I Giullari di Piazza*. My first collaboration was on New Years Eve, 2002. At the time I performed some of the folk songs that were already part of my repertory such as Neapolitan *Ricciulina*, and Salentine tarantella *Pizzicarella*.

Because I was both a researcher and a performer, I was able to experience Belloni's work personally, and intimately as an intellectual project. In the summer of 2003, I decided to participate in a week-long workshop that Belloni was teaching in a villa near Florence, Italy. *Rhythm Is The Cure* was an "annual workshop of the ritual dance and percussion of Southern Italy"

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(Belloni 2003a). During the workshop, Belloni taught traditional styles of Southern Italian music and dance, including the Salentine tarantella tambourine technique. She devoted a full day to tarantismo, recreating the ritual to heal participants.

In the context of the workshop, Belloni invited me to work as her assistant. I helped to create a list of participants, solicited payments, and helped give directions to the villa. Speaking both Italian and English, knowing the dance and the ritual, and being familiar with Tuscan geography—I am originally from Siena, which is a 20 minute car ride from the villa where the workshop was being held—were all important in my work as Belloni's assistant. I also helped Belloni during her teaching sessions, demonstrating the dances and songs with her.

I had a chance to experience the staging of the ritual again in the fall of 2003, during a concert in

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New Paltz, NY, in which I was performing as a singer and dancer. My experience of the concert (the concert "art" staging), and of the Tuscan workshop (the healing "ritual" staging) will be the subject of this chapter's analysis.[1]

Since the beginning of my research with Belloni, I was interested in the relationship between her work and the work of revivalists in Italy. Belloni uses many elements that are also present in the neo-tarantismo movement: staging of the ritual, a specific type of marketing, the universalizing discourse of local "healing rhythm and dance" as globally available and effective. Belloni works in Italy, as well as in the U.S., and is aware of the revival movement in Italy.

However, the artist does not seem to locate her work as part of neo-tarantismo. The way she markets her ritual interpretation is as an "original practice" which nevertheless, she modifies to suite the needs of

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contemporary women in New York City, the United States, and other countries around the world. In my opinion, Belloni is part of what Sabina Magliocco calls *folklore reclamation*, a cultural and political movement that since the late 1950s, has interested the Italian American community (Magliocco 2002).[2]

Folklore reclamation is the desire to re-claim and sometimes re-create spiritual practices that were beforehand considered superstitious, emotional, and did not fit the norm of North American Catholicism. Italian folklore, brought to the New World by immigrant Italian peasants, was often regarded as vulgar in the United States and stigmatized as superstitious and pagan. "The Italian Problem," as Rudolph J. Vecoli mentions in his article "Cult and Occult in Italian-American Culture: The Persistence of a Religious Heritage" (1977:25), was the mix of pre-Christian and Christian beliefs that Italians brought with them, in a religious practice

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that included magic and a direct dialogue between the believers and their patron saints. Italian immigrants "were characterized by ignorance of Christian doctrine, image worship, and superstitious emotionalism," writes Vecoli. In time, many practices declined or were practiced in private homes. That's the tradition in which Magliocco situates folklore reclamation.

While Magliocco focuses her article on the contemporary revival of Italian *stregheria* (witchcraft), I would like to extend the author's theories to the work of Belloni, who re-created the ritual of tarantismo to make it suitable to the social context of contemporary New York City. Belloni takes the ritual of tarantismo overseas and adds to its practice the worship of other saint figures that were not present in the ritual as it was practiced in Salento (particularly the cult of the black Madonna in

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her many forms, from Southern Italian Madonna de' Poveri to Brasilian Yemanja).

Belloni teaches her own interpretations of Salentine and Calabrese tarantella music and dance, Neapolitan *tammoriata* music and dance, and Calabrese St. Rocco's music and dance, as well as her interpretation of Calabrese and Salentine ritual dances, the spinning dance of St. Rocco from Calabria, and the ritual of tarantismo from Salento. She promotes herself as "the only woman in the U.S. and Italy to specialize in Southern Italian percussion combined with ritual dances and singing" (Belloni 2003a). This statement can be misleading. I have met other women in Italy who work with traditional music and dance and who are actively supporting their communities, even though they might not directly call themselves healers, such as Ada Metafune, whose work I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Belloni is, nonetheless, one of the artists

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who have brought the revival of Italian folk music to North America.

When she came to the United States, at the beginning of the 1970s, Belloni was in her early twenties. In the mid-seventies, she met composer and master guitarist John La Barbera. The two met again in Florence and in the U.S. in the early 1980s. At that time, they decided to form the theatre and music troupe called *I Giullari di Piazza*. La Barbera, a native New Yorker, had lived in Florence working with the Apulian troupe *Pupi e Fresedde* (Puppets and Hard Bread)—a company founded in Florence in 1976 by theatre director Angelo Savelli and composer Pino de Vittorio—that performed a repertoire of Italian folk songs and characters from the Commedia dell'Arte.

Since then, Belloni has been marketing her work as "traditional" (to support this statement, Belloni and the members of her troupe make use of theatrical

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costumes (long white skirts, large belts, scarves, head garlands, etc.), while at the same time, developing her own Signature Series of tambourines and *tammorras*, created in collaboration with Remo, Inc. a U.S. drum manufacturer.[3]

Belloni's research on tarantismo started in the early 1980s. In 1982 Belloni became familiar with Ernesto De Martino's book *La terra del rimorso* (for more information on the content of this book, see chapter 1 and chapter 3 of this dissertation). Also in the 1980s, Belloni had met artist Pino di Vittorio (from Lecce, Apulia), who knew about the ritual of tarantismo, and who shared with Belloni his knowledge of pizzica singing techniques. In her fieldwork in Italy, Belloni had also studied tambourine with Alfio Antico, a Sicilian master frame drummer who later became Belloni's teacher and inspiration (Belloni 1997:37-38).

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In the CD jacket of *Tarantata: Dance of the Ancient Spider,* Belloni explains how she became more involved with research on tarantismo. When she visited Salento (Torre Paduli) in 1982, she was the "only woman playing tambourine, all through the night, bleeding on the skin of the drums, challenged by men to prove my strength." (Belloni 2000) This experience which made her popular "as part of the guy's team of tambourine players" and separated her from "the younger women," was a turning point in Belloni's career. After drumming all night she woke up the following morning, feeling "great, falling asleep on the beach, awakening to a new flow of energy, feeling light and really good about myself." Belloni traveled back to the U.S. bringing "the cure" back to New York with her (Belloni 2000).

With the production of *La Lupa* [The She-Wolf] (1987)—based on a novel with the same title by Italian novelist Giovanni Verga—the study of tarantismo became

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a more personal matter. The main female character of the novel, La Lupa, is a woman in love, suffering for a man who is in love with her daughter. In Belloni's interpretation of this novel—in which she performed La Lupa—the She Wolf was in the end of the play represented as becoming a tarantata.

From her personal experience, Belloni began to share the "dance of the ancient spider" with other women:

> I healed myself from irregular bleeding with the dance and cancelled a surgery. I helped other women. I realized that you could become a tarantata anywhere. Through the tambourine and dance, I chose a *new* healing path, working primarily with women, teaching them how to find inner power by drumming and breaking free through wild erotic dance. (Belloni 2000) [My emphasis]

Not unlike sociologists, historians, and other revivalists in Italy, Belloni is an outsider looking at

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a tradition. Despite "feeling like a tarantata," Belloni is not Salentine nor does she have Salentine family. However, not unlike some Salentine artists in the second wave of revival, what attracts Belloni to tarantella and tarantismo is its re-clamation, re-creation, re-invention, re-establishment and transformation to fit the new needs of local (New York City) and/or global communities (world music, or as we will see later, the community of women at large). "My intention," she writes, "is to create a cross cultural musical celebration as an expression of the healing power of feminine energy." (Belloni 2000)

The language Belloni uses to describe the folk repertory she interprets has strong romantic nuances that, more often than not, find their strength in eroticism. The artists, in the jackets of her CDs, in her programs, flyers, and on her website, emphasizes the mythical, sensual, and erotic elements of the

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ritual. On Belloni's website,[4] her concert *Rhythm is the Cure* is described this way:

> *Rhythm is the Cure* describes the cycles of life, women, and nature through powerful rhythms and haunting melodies, using the symbolism of the Madonna/Mother Earth Goddess found in Southern Italian culture. Sensuality, eroticism, loneliness, and fear of disease and death are expressed through ancient prayers, chanting and drumming, invoking the spirit world through trance and self-hypnosis. […] In all cultures, especially in Brazil, Africa, and the East, the most ancient way of praying is indeed singing, drumming and dancing. Southern Italian rhythms and chants were influenced by North Africa and the Middle East and we wish to bring back the voices of our ancestors by making this musical connection with the contemporary musical elements and a variety of rhythms from around the world. (Belloni 2002[5]).

The strength of this description—the breadth of a general comparative analysis collapsing ritual and

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performance as a potent physical and spiritual healing combination—is also, in my opinion, its weakness. Southern Italy becomes another flag to add on the map of world music sites, another place of "otherness."

The description of *Tarantata: Dance of the Ancient Spider* (both a CD and a performance), states that this revival of tarantismo ritual music and dance is "dedicated to all women who have known the anguish and desperation of feeling trapped in a mythical spider web. Her [Belloni's] wish is to bring this ancient cure of wild dancing back to all women who need to free themselves from their spider webs and find their true expression" (Belloni 2002[6]). Belloni opens the ritual to "all women," and they become the community. But what does the artist mean by "all women"? Belloni teaches the ritual of tarantismo during workshops called *Rhythm is the Cure* around the U.S., South America, and Europe. The workshops are open to women and men of all ages,

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ethnicities, and religious beliefs.[7] Perhaps this openness, when related to a "traditional" ritual practice, is what is meant behind "all women." In other words, one does not need to be Salentine, Italian, Italian-American, nor reside in Italy, to participate.[8]

Belloni began teaching Southern Italian tambourine and dance classes in 1996. Based in the crypt of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, her lessons included the practice of the pizzica tarantata "ritual dance." Most of the participants of these classes were women of Italian descent, as in the example of Mary Ciuffitelli and Michela Musolino who joined the class in 1996 and 1997, respectively. Students learned Neapolitan tammuriata, Montemaranese and Calabrese tarantella, 16th-century tarantella, as well as the ritual dance of tarantismo, the pizzica tarantata (Ciuffitelli 2004).

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While Musolino knew from her family that tarantella was, originally, the "dance of the spider," and was related to a ritual, Ciuffitelli had never heard of tarantismo. All she knew about tarantella before she met Belloni was that "tarantella was only a silly dance that we did at Italian-American weddings," and that "it was light, it was silly, and it was fun." (Ciuffitelli 2004) Ciuffitelli describes the classes this way:

> What I remember most about these early classes was the camaraderie among the women. There was a familiarity between us, and a sense that meeting at the Cathedral was pre-ordained. The first classes were all women and nearly every one of us had a name derived from Mary. There was Mary, Marlene, a couple of Maria(s), Maria pronounced Ma-rye-a (…). Mary, the Madonna, was always a strong presence and connector.

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Belloni helped many women restore a link to Italian traditions that most of their families had left behind when they immigrated. The attempt to leave the past behind, particularly for those immigrants who were leaving behind a condition of harsh poverty and injustice, was not confined to the experience of Southern Italians coming to the Americas. Belloni "opened a door to an old-new world of music that meant something. It was a door opening a way to our past through music that did not survive the ocean crossing. It was a magic door" (Ciuffitelli 2004).

Students performed the ritual with Belloni in the crypt of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (where Belloni also held her rehearsals and where *I Giullari di Piazza* have their office), as well as at home, alone, accompanying the dance with music from Belloni's CDs (Musolino 2004; Ciuffitelli 2004). Participants met regularly to talk about their Italian and Italian-

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American heritage, about folk music and dance, and about tarantismo. When I asked Ciuffitelli what they found attractive in the classes and in their participation in Belloni's staging of the ritual, Ciuffitelli replied:

> We women, the self-described tarantate had frequent and long conversations about why this music drew us in so strongly. We talked a lot about the connection to our ancestors, especially our foremothers. This became a deep theme that we looked at over and over—our connection to our grandmothers and to our ancestral homeland. [For us] as immigrants, it brought forth a longing to connect. If she didn't emigrate, would she be tarantata? Bitten, unable to cope? How did they suffer? Was the poverty, the labor, the oppression, the repression, the constriction unbearable? And if they didn't emigrate, would we be tarantate? Was I dancing for this other possible self? Were we dancing to release the suffering of our ancestors? But our grandmothers left south Italy. That made them braver and

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> stronger. Didn't it? We descended from them. We saw ourselves as strong, independent women. We imagined that, yes, unable to express our creativity, our sexuality, our choices, we would absolutely, unquestionably, be tarantate.

Women in the class used to meet, dressed in "gauzy white skirts and peasant blouses and danced, spun and writhed on the floor to taped pizzica music or to Alessandra's [Belloni's] drumming." (Ciuffitelli 2004) Sometimes the boundaries between ritual and performance blurred: "Was this a dance class or was it ritual?" asks Ciuffitelli. "It certainly became a kind of group therapy as we relayed our stories of family, affairs and broken relationships." (Ciuffitelli 2004) Ciuffitelli adds that the women in the class used the ritual to:

> try to heal ourselves; to drive away negative emotions, to invoke our ancestors, especially our foremothers; to dance together and offer support

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> for each other; and to dance at parties. (Ciuffitelli 2004)

Exposure to Southern Italian traditions (through Belloni's work) gave some of these women a key to re-interpret their past and their present. As a result of Ciuffitelli's attendance to conference *Performing Ecstasies* in Los Angeles in 2000,[9] for example, her whole approach to pizzica and tarantismo changed. Ciuffitelli experienced Salentine music, food, and dance; she met the revival band Aramirè, she saw original documentaries of tarantate in 1950s, and attended lectures by scholars and artists on related topics.

After she returned from the conference, Ciuffitelli found herself needing to dance constantly:

> I danced everyday feeling the emotion fully when there was nothing else to do—the emotional side, not the analytical—no right answers. I am so

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> hungry and I can't eat. I am so tired and I can't sleep. Is this the state of ecstasy that we've been talking about for days? Or the state that needs the cure? (Ciuffitelli 2004)

After personal life changes, and after experiencing the "authentic" music and dance, Ciuffitelli, not unlike other artists who were part of these first classes, such as Michela Musolino, decided to start their own research.

Ciuffitelli, for example, began organizing workshops for the Salentine band Aramirè in the U.S., and produced two tours for the band in 2002.[10] After her experience with Salentine Aramirè, and after being exposed to the research work of the band in Salento, Ciuffitelli learned more details about the traditional tarantismo system in Salento.[11] In January 2004, she wrote to me: "When you are quoting me, I hope you say I don't believe you can practice, or teach, pizzica

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tarantismo. You can use pizzica music for all kinds of things—for fun, release, most certainly seduction—but its not tarantismo." (Ciuffitelli 2004a)

Musolino, instead, focused her research on Sicilian folk music and released her debut album, *Songs of Trinacria: A Collection of Sicilian Folk Music*, in 2002 on the Italian Alfa Music label. Currently Musolino gives concerts and teaches Italian folk songs and dances in schools.

5.1 The Concert "Art" Staging of the Tarantismo Ritual

I participated in Belloni's concert staging of the tarantata ritual on October 26, 2003, when I was invited to perform as a dancer and singer. The title of the concert was *Tarantella e Canti d'Amore: Mystical Trance Rituals, Laments of Love, and Prayer Songs of Southern Italy* (Tarantellas and Chants of Love).[12]

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Sponsored by The Luigi and Anita Traverso Italian Studies Endowment, this concert was performed at the Studley Theatre on the SUNY New Paltz Campus. The performers involved in this concert were: John La Barbera (acoustic guitar, classical guitar, strumming guitar, mandolin, and mandola); Steve Gorn (bansuri flutes, clarinet); Abraham Stuart (violin); Mauro Refosco (percussion); Laura Biagi (vocals and dance); Francesca Silvano and Juliet Gentile (ritual dances).

The program featured a repertory of Italian folk songs plus "Mystical Trance Rituals," of which the staging of the ritual of tarantismo was the only one. The staging was not rehearsed because the other dancer besides Belloni who performed it, Juliet Gentile, had already participated in a healing workshop with Belloni and had already staged it on other occasions. Belloni asked me to perform in this section but I refused, like

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other times before, because I never felt comfortable performing the ritual on stage.

The tarantismo ritual staging was the last number on the program, even though the Salentine healing tarantella, the *pizzica tarantata*, was also used to open the concert. Belloni started the pizzica as a musician, singing and playing the tambourine. A couple of minutes into the song, Gentile came on stage bringing a ritual white sheet that she laid on the floor. Gentile, dressed in white, also brought in red ribbons (we will see later, in the description of the workshops, that the ribbons have a precise function in Belloni's interpretation of this ritual). While we were playing the song, Gentile started dancing around the sheet. She shook her head while performing the pizzica-skipped dance. She also let her arms hang, sometimes shaking them as if to release them from tension. Gentile's movement of the head and of the arms

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suggested a release of tension. Eventually Gentile fell on the floor, abandoning herself to the dance of the spider. She shook her head and legs, thrusting her pelvis in the air and pushing her torso on the floor with the help of her legs, bent at the knees.

Half way through the song, Belloni left the vocal part of the song to me and went to dance with Gentile. She first approached Gentile's head with the drum, with the intent to heal her through the sound of the tambourine. Then Gentile stood up and it was Belloni's turn to dance. She performed the same movements that Gentile had performed (the shaking of the head, the pizzica step, the movement of the head and pelvis), except with more energy and strength, more self-assurance, and precision. I looked at the audience, predominantly made of students and faculty from the SUNY New Paltz campus. I was curious to see their

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reaction. Most of them seemed curious about the dance and most of them had their eyes on Belloni and Gentile.

Eventually Belloni fell on the floor, while still playing the tambourine, and performed the tarantella on the ritual sheet. The musicians knew that when Belloni was on the floor, the end of the song was approaching. It was at this time that the fire alarm of the theatre began to ring. We kept looking at each other and at the dance, in order find the right time to end the song. Belloni was still dancing and the audience did not seem to leave their seats. We kept playing the pizzica, through the deafening sound of the alarm. Eventually Belloni stopped the dance, the music ended, and the concert was over. The audience's applause filled the theatre, while the alarm was still sounding.

Before the concert, Italian-American dancer and writer Juliet Gentile had expressed her excitement to perform the ritual on stage. I asked her why and she

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answered that she really needed it. She needed the ritual to release the tension of some events that were happening in her life at the time. Previously, in August of 2003, I interviewed Gentile and asked her what she had healed with her work with Belloni and the revival of tarantismo. She replied:

> I have healed many things in the practice of tarantella. It has been a year and five months since I first heard Alessandra's [Belloni's] *Tarantata* CD and since then I have used it as a tool together with the drumming and dance techniques too many times to count for personal healing. I have, however, employed the power of the pizzica twice for specific healing purposes. Once was for the purification of my body after "remembering" sexual abuse which occurred during a long-term relationship with a man when I was 18-22 years old. The second time occurred some months later after this realization, when I came close to plummeting into a relationship with another destructive man, one I was able to get out of. Ironically, this man was the one who for years had

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> told me about Alessandra [Belloni] and led me to find her. Most importantly, the pizzica was a useful tool to bring me into body-awareness, which I had tried to escape after being hurt by abuse. After re-learning to love my body, I was able to venerate it with dance and music, like I have the Black Madonna for so many years. (Gentile 2003)

Abuse, tormented, unhappy, unfulfilled love, emotional blockages, and stress are some of the points that Belloni highlights in her application of the tarantata ritual in her contemporary practice. When I asked Belloni why she chose to perform a concert art staging of the ritual, she emphasized the importance of sharing this form with an audience. Staging the ritual, for Belloni, activates the healing potential of the ritual and can benefit both the audience and the performers.

The belief that performing the tarantata ritual on stage can heal the audience is also the opinion of

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Michela Musolino, a dancer and singer who worked with Belloni between 1997 and 2000. Musolino participated in Belloni's ritual workshops before and also performed the ritual on stage several times. When I asked her about the motives behind staging the ritual, she answered that, despite the fact that she wouldn't perform the tarantata on stage any more, at the time of her involvement with Belloni, performing the dance was healing for her. Performing the ritual on stage was healing for the audience, too. "It's a matter of intent," she told me. "Every time I performed the ritual on stage I would dedicate the dance to someone and, always, to the audience. Then, I would get lost in the ritual dance and would forget about the performance and the audience altogether" (Musolino 2004).

Personally, I always felt uncomfortable at the idea of performing the ritual on stage, therefore I never did. The only time I danced the ritual tarantella

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was in the context of Belloni's healing workshop in Tuscany, which I analyze below.

5.2 The Healing Ritual Staging

I participated in the "Rhythm is the Cure: Annual Workshop of the Ritual Dance and Percussion of Southern Italy," in August 2003. The workshop was held in a villa near Florence and Siena. The workshop flyer promised that Alessandra Belloni would "take you on a healing musical journey in the magical land of Tuscany, Italy" (Belloni 2003a). In June of 2003 Belloni invited me to participate in the workshop and offered me a work/study exchange. I worked for the two months prior to the workshop to help participants schedule their trips and answer various questions about travel, how to get to the villa from Florence, or what clothes to bring (Belloni requires people to wear white during the tarantata ritual). Right from the beginning, when

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people found out that I was from Italy, they began to ask me about my ancestry and began to share their stories of immigration to the U.S. Out of the twenty-one participants (ages ranging from 11 to early 60's), half were from the States; others came from Northern Europe (Sweden, Germany, Holland), others were from Italy. A few foreigners were of Italian descent. All were women. Sessions were both in English and Italian. Belloni, special guest Franco Santoro (a healer and scholar of shamanism) and I alternated as translators.

Among the participants, many did not know about the tradition of tarantismo in Apulia. Two had come for Santoro's teachings, another woman "to free her throat *chakra* and to learn the drumming," another "to learn the dances," another to "let herself free from the past," another "to find out more about her Italian ancestry and related art and healing traditions," another "to change her life," another "to discover the

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power of her hands" (through drumming), another because she "was very interested in the metaphor of spinning and entanglement."[13] I had come to gather material for my dissertation and to assist Belloni. I wanted to experience the ritual after several years of academic studies about it.

In her introduction on the first day, Belloni underlined that her interest in tarantismo was connected to her interest on the Black Madonnas of Southern Italy and around the world. She told us that all the dances were connected to earth rituals (seasonal rituals) and that all of them embraced elements of sensuality, joy, sadness, fear, prayer, and release. Those same elements could be experienced while dancing. Also Belloni made clear that she was not only interested in teaching drumming and dance techniques, but that she wanted to "transmit love, passion, and fire," and that she wanted to help people free

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themselves because this helped her to "free herself from the web."

The workshop started on a Monday and the ritual was scheduled for the following Friday. In the days prior to the ritual, Belloni taught other dances (St. Rocco's dance, Neapolitan tammuriata, and Montemaranese tarantella). She also taught tambourine and tammorra drumming techniques so that, on the day of the tarantata ritual, the participants had all already practiced some dance and drumming techniques.

The ritual session lasted for approximately three hours. We were in an indoor space that the villa provided us with in case of bad weather (the forecast was for rain, after three months of draught). The space looked like a small crypt with stonewalls, two small windows, an image of the Madonna placed on one of the windows, and tea light candles burning.

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Belloni gave a short lecture before the session to provide the participants with some information about Salentine tarantismo, her experience with it, and her interpretation. Belloni explained the importance of the group in her ritual. Healing of the individual was not separate from the healing of the group.

Belloni introduced the element of the red ribbons (her innovation). Each participant was given two red ribbons, one for each hand, to hold. When the dance began, Belloni explained, one woman at a time would go to the center to dance her "spider dance," a cathartic dance in which each woman could express herself freely. Belloni had shown some movements of the pizzica but, in reality, she was not expecting people to dance like tarantate. She did suggest, however, to dance in circles, spin around oneself, and also dance while lying on the floor. While one person was in the center, the others in the circle were supposed to shake their

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ribbons towards the center, to send their energy to the person dancing, to support the healing of the individual and of the entire group. When the woman at the center felt that her dance was over, she could choose another person in the circle surrounding her.

Belloni suggested that the person in the center would let the person in the circle choose her, through exchange of "energy." Once the person in the center *felt* whom she wanted to choose, she had to signal the next woman with the red ribbon. The woman in the circle would begin to dance with the woman in the center and then they switched placed. In this way, the healing dance would be uninterrupted, flowing from one person to the next until the last person had danced.

After this explanation, the ritual session began. Belloni had previously asked me to sing a song to open the ritual. I suggested I could sing *Sola Sola* (All Alone), a song from Salento that tells about a man who

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meets a woman in the street and tries to seduce her. The woman is able to escape the unwanted man's courtship. She tells him to come visit her later at her mother's house, when she will be all alone, *sola sola*, but then never opens the door to him. I chose this song because of its beautiful melody and because I was inspired by the wit of its female character. The song, however, was not traditionally linked to the ritual of tarantismo.

After the song, Belloni and I brought a white to the center of the circle while singing *Fimmine Fimmine*, a work song from Apulia that denounces the physical and psychological abuse of women working in the fields of tobacco or harvesting grapes and olives. The song ends with an invocation to St. Paul, the Saint of the tarantulas and the women bitten. We laid the sheet on the floor. Then Belloni attached a red ribbon to each

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corner (symbolizing the four directions), and a series of *santini*, little cards depicting saints.

At the end of the song, Santoro knew he had to turn on a CD player with Belloni's CD *Tarantelle e Canti d'Amore* in it. The CD was set to play the same track—the healing tarantella from Salento, pizzica tarantata—continuously. The CD was turned up to maximum volume. The sound was amplified even more by the acoustics of the stone walled chamber we were in. The sound was overwhelming. It brought us "out of time" and situated us in another sense of bodily, mental, and acoustic space.

Belloni was the first to dance. She started playing the tambourine at the same time. She danced standing for a while, performing the skipping step of the pizzica, then started spinning and, eventually, fell on the floor. There, on the ritual sheet, while still holding the drum, she let her body shake, twist,

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and roll. Her eyes closed, Belloni spent about five minutes on the floor. Belloni was surrounded by the participants, who were shaking red ribbons over her white dress and white sheet.

After her dance, Belloni chose me with her red ribbon. I jumped in the center of the circle. I began dancing the pizzica pizzica, the Salentine tarantella I had learned in Salento. I let myself make the steps a little larger, enjoying my physicality, and enjoying the presence of the participants who were now the witnesses of my dance. I indulged in the pleasure of dancing a personal healing dance in front of other women, strangers, for the most part. It was a performance and it was a ritual. I danced the tarantella step I was familiar with, and then improvised. I skipped, jumped, screamed, spun.

I fell on the floor and kept thinking about my ancestors, about all the women in my family. I

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dedicated my dance to them. I performed gestures that help me release tension, fear, and discomfort, such as rolling, shaking my head, and jumping. Belloni came closer to me, playing her tambourine near my ears. I shook my head, shook my arms and legs, and dragged my body on the floor. I wanted to be a spider, I wanted to be a tarantata, and I wanted to feel that my personal history could be shared, could be understood, and could be released. It felt good to scream, jump, and feel it was totally acceptable to this group of witnesses.

I was always aware of the gaze of Belloni and of the other women, of their sounds, the stomp of their feet on the floor, their body heat. I danced for about 5 minutes. I did not reach a peak as I had hoped. I felt that because I was "doing research," and because I was Belloni's "assistant," I was holding back. I stood up again, spinning, ready to let another woman in. I was not able to let go completely and felt a little

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frustrated. All my expectations on how the ritual should or could feel became an obstacle to my true experience. Or perhaps the ritual is so personal that cannot be staged for me, even in a ritual context.

I let myself approach another woman. I finally felt attracted to one and signaled her with the red ribbon. When she finally entered the center I went back to the circle. I remained there at the edge, empty, sad, and happy to be alive all at the same time. I tried to send support to the woman on the floor. Belloni was still in the center, supporting every woman with her tambourine. The music from the CD was loud; the ternary beat of the drum was playing insistently. Heat rose from the dancing bodies and the flaming candles.

Part of my work as an assistant was to make sure that the sheet on the floor was properly set during and after each dance. I gathered up and replaced the little

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saint cards on the sheet. I also sprayed women with fresh water to keep them cool.

We went in one at a time. Some of the dances were very difficult to watch. One woman, for example, shook herself violently on the floor, and kept crying. Her body was very tense and contracted, and her facial expression showed pain. At the end of the dance, she could not stop trembling. Fortunately, Belloni was always there with her drumming and reassuring presence. We all could rely on her to give us a center, a point of reference. Santoro's presence in the circle was also very important. He helped women once they came back from the center, holding them, spraying them with water, and assisting in any other way needed.

Another woman, Jacqueline Comito, danced a beautiful sensual dance, devoid of the suffering of others. When I asked her to send me a comment about her experience, this is what she wrote:

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As I stood at one end of the semi-circle, holding the space for the others while throwing my energy into the center, it was through the heat, the movement and the music that I was able to let go and experience. [...] And most importantly, I knew that the presence of all of us in that room had opened the space for these women to really see themselves free from all of what society might tell them outside the room. So, the dance is about truly loving and allowing others and ourselves to exist within the moment. It was a moment of clarity for me. Maybe it was the sheer pleasure that comes from putting ones body to a physical test and pushing it degrees farther than you thought it could go. [...] I could so clearly see my beauty and the beauty of everyone else in that room. That is really the healing that comes from this ritual. Outside that room in our everyday life we do not often enough remember our own beauty, our dance and our song. It is something that cannot be observed. It is something that has to be experienced. It is a beautiful thing. (Comito 2004)

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There were 19 people participating in the ritual and all of us danced. After the last woman danced, we all laid on the floor of the room to rest. Belloni walked around playing her "ocean drum" (a frame drum with sand between two layers of skin), "washing us" with vibration, continuing to heal us. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. The ritual was over.

After we left the room, we could choose to have dinner at the villa. The evening time was free and participants could do what they wished with their time. I took some time off to process my experience. Then I had a light dinner and sat outside in a little terrace near the main entrance of the villa. There were other women there and we shared our experiences. We were all feeling tired. Some of us were experiencing anger, other a satisfied sense of release, and others did not want to talk at all.

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The following morning, Belloni and Santoro facilitated a ritual circle to share people's reactions to the ritual. Some of the participants thanked Belloni for bringing this ritual back (in other words, for reviving it). Some women experienced "a rebirth," "a coming back to life;" another woman "felt rooted and reconnected" to her family roots (she had Salentine heritage); another woman was able "to release guilt" through the healing presence of the Madonna image and in the room, another woman felt "safe to express her sexuality," and another was able to "dare to be divine."[14] When the workshop ended, on Monday, September 1, 2003, people were happy, moved, and changed. Friendships had formed and people were inspired to continue their own research in traditional dance and drumming, and in music and dance as prayer. We exchanged emails and contact information. We hugged,

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and kissed goodbye. Some people remained in Italy for a little longer. Others went back to the U.S.

5.3 Departures

Stylistic and conceptual departures from tradition have been part of the Italian folk revival since its inception in the 1950s. There would not be the need for revival without social, political, and economic change. Departures are a form of change. However, as I already noted earlier, innovative revival work risks the dilution of traditional content. I would like to point out some of the difference between Belloni's interpretation and use of the tarantata ritual, and how it was traditionally practiced:

1. Belloni frames the ritual in the context of metaphor. In the brochure of the workshop in Tuscany she wrote:

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> The dance called PIZZICA TARANTATA cured a mental disorder called Tarantismo, which afflicted mainly women, who felt stuck in the spider web of their society. (…) Part of the ritual takes place on the floor, and the dance is actually a spider-like movement on the ground. This part has the most amazing healing effect, releasing stress, blockage of sexual energy, as well as opening the heart and throat chakra according to the movements, as if coming out of an imaginary SPIDER WEB. (Belloni 2003a)

Belloni uses "bite" as a metaphor for women's submission and/or psychological entrapment; "spider's web" for social conformism and morality; and the ritual as a healing practice to get rid of the bite and of the spider's web. At the same time, for Belloni, the "spider" is both the cause of suffering (it could be a problem, a person causing a problem, or a difficult situation), and the woman suffering. Belloni supports this metaphor with the use of the ancient Greek myth of

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Aracne, a superb weaver who challenged the goddess Athena in a contest and who, upon success, was turned into a spider by the jealous goddess and cursed to spin her web forever. The spider is the creatrix of her web (destiny), but her creation is already determined by divine intervention.

The metaphorical approach to the ritual affects how participants relate to the ritual dance. Belloni encourages people to get rid of the "imaginary spider web" during the dance with gestures that suggest this release (shedding, letting go, taking off, brushing off of the web).

For the traditional tarantate, the spider's bite was a real bite and not a matter of metaphors. Being a tarantata was not a choice one made to talk metaphorically about entrapment, sexual and psychological abuse, or social injustice. The bite was a bite, and the healing dance was performed to heal the

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woman from the spider's venomous effects. Being a tarantata was considered a *malattia* (illness, but also malaise), and both the taranta and her family suffered for it. Tarantismo was a system rooted in a particular society (poor and rural), in a particular geographical area (Salento, almost completely surrounded by the Adriatic and Ionian seas), and at a particular historical moment (the traditional form as I have analyzed it in this dissertation, which started to change after the 1980s).

In the traditional system, metaphor was not part of the discourse of illness or healing. Belloni's interpretation of this ritual, however, brings metaphor to the forefront, providing a name for feelings and experiences that are difficult to verbalize and therefore difficult to accept (abuse, in its many forms). In Belloni's interpretation, one can choose to define herself as a tarantata, i.e., to appropriate,

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share, or use a cosmology without being part of a local community with shared beliefs and/or social norms.

2. Belloni's ritual is a group ritual. All the participants get to dance "the spider's dance" and to be in the outside circle. While the ritual was a group ritual in the 16th and 17th centuries (see De Martino 1996 [c 1961]), in the form as it was practiced in the 1950s, there was only one woman, the tarantata, in the center of the ritual ronda. People around her were not tarantate. They were musicians, family, and friends.

3. In Belloni's ritual, each woman is given red ribbons (one for each hand). The participants shake the red ribbons towards the center, to support and "send healing energy" to the woman dancing at that time. This is an innovation brought in by Belloni. In the traditional ritual, the tarantata is offered ribbons of different colors (red is one of the colors; other colors are yellow and green) to see which ones she

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reacts to. When and if the tarantata reacts to a particular color, it means that this is the color of the spider that bit her. This is a form of color therapy that can support the healing work of the musicians. Each spider, as I wrote earlier, has a personal color and tune she reacts to (see chapter 3).

4. In Belloni's ritual as it was practiced in Tuscany, the women danced one after the other to the music of one of Belloni's CDs (*Tarantelle e Canti d'Amore*). In the opening tune of the CD, Belloni plays the Pizzica Taranta, the healing ritual tarantella of Salento. Belloni had accidentally hurt her wrist the week before the workshop and was not able to play throughout the ritual session (3 hours long). The CD was therefore supporting Belloni who, despite her injury, still played the tambourine for each woman entering the ritual circle to dance on the floor. The availability of a CD with the Pizzica Taranta, the

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tarantella music originally used for healing in Salento, also allows people to dance alone, at home (Ciuffitelli 2004; Musolino 2004). While this is an advantage (one can dance the pizzica any time she needs it), it is also a departure from the traditional ritual in which each woman had to be diagnosed by the musicians with a specific tune that would excite the spirit of the spider who bit her. Using the same tune on a CD dilutes the details of the musical cure, reduced to the possibility of only a single track.

5. Belloni locates the roots of tarantismo in a mythic past, in goddess rituals of ancient Greece:

> In ancient times, southern Italy was part of Greece and was called Magna Graecia. Here, worship of the Mother Earth Goddess (Cybele/Demeter/Gaia) was predominant, and connected to a strong matriarchal society. There is a vestige of this tradition today in the worship of the Black Madonna. (Belloni 2000)

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And:

> In Magna Grecia, what is now Southern Italy, women used the frame drums for rituals honoring the Moon Goddess; in Rome, men and women in rituals honoring Dionysus and Cybele played the frame drum. In the Middle Ages, these healing trance dances of purification were thought to cure women afflicted by a form of insanity induced by the bite of the largest of European spiders, the wolf spider, or tarantula. Using the idea of the most ancient way of healing in Southern Italian culture, the chants are sung by Alessandra Belloni in harmony with other women using different frame drums, tambourines and shakers together with various styles of drumming. (Belloni 2004)

While historian Ernesto De Martino points to thematic links between ancient Greek mythology and the symbolism present in tarantismo (De Martino 1996 [1961]), he locates the origin of tarantismo in Salento, between the 9th and the 12th centuries, at the time when Christians and Muslims fought to establish

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control over the Mediterranean (De Martino 1996:232 [1961]). Other scholars, such as Luigi Chiriatti, reclaim tarantismo as Salentine, dating it back to the local Messapi population of 2000 BC (Chiriatti 2002). Origins are not always easy to trace, of course, especially for tarantismo, of which written accounts are sparse until the 17th century.

6. In the context of Belloni's concerts and healing workshops, the presence of the Black Madonna is invoked as a beneficial figure in the process of women's healing. For Belloni, the Black Madonna is a goddess archetype present in many countries around the world (Brazil, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Spain, Switzerland, and USA). Often considered the Christian God's counterpart, in Italy the Black Madonna is especially venerated in the South. She takes many local names. In Calabria, for example,

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the Black Madonna di Seminara is also called the Madonna dei Poveri, Madonna of the Poor. During the last two decades, research on the Black Madonna in Italy has showed the existence of a connection between these goddess figures, and sites of social struggle, political awareness, and women's socio-political advancement (see Chiavola Birnbaum 1993; Begg 1996).

Belloni adopted this interpretation of the cult Black Madonna and transferred it to her interpretation of the ritual of tarantismo. Belloni argues that tarantismo is a ritual of the earth, a seasonal ritual that originally was performed also to celebrate Mother Earth/the Black Madonna.[15] It is well known that other Southern Italian dances and drumming styles are performed in honor of the Black Madonna (I am referring here to the Neapolitan *tammuriata*, for example), but none of the studies I have previously read on tarantismo pointed to the connection between the Black

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Madonna and the Salentine tarantella. This might be due to the fact that the only Black Madonna in Apulia, Santa Maria della Consolazione in the cathedral of the city of Bari, is not in Salento.

While I can see the connection between the ritual of tarantismo and seasonal rituals connected to agricultural societies, I believe the link between the spider dance and the cult of the Black Madonna comes from Belloni's own interpretation. Belloni replaces the figure of St. Paul, predominant in the Salentine traditional ritual of tarantismo, with the figure of the Black Madonna, conferring her the power traditionally attributed to him: to assist and protect the new(neo) tarantate in the healing, and to possibly grant a grace.

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5.4 Conclusions

As I wrote before, I never felt comfortable performing the ritual onstage. The only time I performed the tarantata was during the healing workshop in Tuscany. There is something uncomfortable in the revival of this ritual, something that has haunted me since the beginning of my research. The ritual was such a private and intimate practice that it feels sacrilegious to stage it, to make it public, to make it empowering, to turn the condition of tarantata into a state that people can appropriate in a workshop, like a title, like a CD of world music (Salentine, perhaps) that you can buy at a local store.

Can there be tarantate everywhere? This question, ending this research, is the opposite of the one that started the dissertation: Has the ritual disappeared? These two questions are, it seems to me, two sides of the same coin. Two opposite viewpoints that depend on

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each other to be validated. As soon as the ritual was revived– first by anthropologists, and afterwards by artists–the number of tarantati began to decrease. Around the time when the number of tarantati came to zero, when scholars began to talk about a "disappearance," people from other Italian regions, the U.S., and the rest of Europe began to make yearly pilgrimages to Galatina (Salento) for the feast of St. Paul. Many of these neo-pilgrims were women and many of them understood tarantismo as an emotional, a spiritual, and psychological state that could be shared across cultures. All of a sudden, in the course of a disappearance, the town of Galatina itself was revived, with neo-tarantati dancing in the streets, hungry for personal answers.

Are there any tarantate left? Aren't all women tarantate? Perhaps these two opposite opinions depend on each other to be validated.

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ENDNOTES:

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[1] I interviewed Belloni in June 2003, but she afterwards refused to permit me to use the interview in my writing. Therefore, I had to omit it.

[2] I would like to thank Dr. Joseph Sciorra for recommending Magliocco's article.

[3] While it is important for people in the U.S. to have access to Southern Italian tambourines and tammorras, something can be said about producing traditional drums industrially. In Salento, pizzica drums are made by hand, one by one, with human precision and detail. The role of the drum in tarantella and tarantismo is highly symbolic (see chapter 2). Sound quality, social meaning, and ritual function go hand in hand and, with industrial production, part of the quality, meaning, and function gets lost.

[4] The address is: www.alessandrabelloni.com. I visited all the pages in Belloni's website between the spring of 2003 and the winter of 2004.

[5] Exact page:
www.alessandrabelloni.com/rhythmcureconcerts.htm

[6] Exact page: www.alessandrabelloni.com/tarantata.htm.

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[7] Despite the fact that the workshops are open to people of different social backgrounds and nationality, they are geared to people who can afford to pay the average amount for a workshop of this kind. The weeklong workshop in Tuscany (which included full room and board) was $1,000 (qtd. in workshop brochure).

[8] What about men? Belloni's "hyper-feminization" of the ritual is not unique to her work. As I discussed in the previous chapter, an essentialist discourse on the erotic female as the main character of the ritual is embedded in the revival performances of tarantismo since the early 1990s.

[9] "Performing Ecstasies: Music, Dance, and Ritual in the Mediterranean," an international and interdisciplinary symposium/festival including conferences, exhibits, films, and concerts; co-sponsored by the Ethnomusicology Department, UCLA; Istituto Italiano di Cultura of Los Angeles; Provincia di Lecce (Puglia, Italy); Claremont Consortium for Medieval & Early Modern Studies; Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, UCLA; October 7-22, 2000. www.ethnomusic.ucla.edu/Conference/home.htm.

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[10] In April and September 2002. The details of the tour can be found on Mary Ciuffitelli's website: www.incantata.com.

[11] Among the people Ciuffitelli learned with are Roberto Raheli of the band Aramirè, Salentine film director Edoardo Winspeare, and German scholar (but Salento resident) Karen Luëdtke (Ciuffitelli 2004a).

[12] *Tarantelle & Canti d'Amore* is also the title of Belloni's last CD, released on March 18th, 2003, by Naxos World.

[13] All the quotes from the workshop come from my private notes. To respect the privacy of participants, I will not mention names with the exception of Jacqueline Comito, who gave me consent to do so in her case.

[14] Author's private notes from the workshop.

[15] Belloni explained this link to the workshop participants in Tuscany, August 2003.

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APPENDIX

1. *Trusting Spirit: Stories of a Woman and a Tarantula*

By Laura Biagi

Nightmares

I hear her voice. Yes, I can hear it. "La la la la la la la la," it sings. "La la la la la la la" she is calling me. At night she visits me in my dreams and I see her under my covers or on my pillow. She hides in the floral patterns of my sheets. I wake up and sit up, in a cold sweat. But she has already disappeared. "La la la," singing. I wish I could stop this.

He stopped coming then he came back. He was trying to get out of the terrarium. I am afraid and I try to push

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Trusting Spirit back in the squared glass container that is now his home. When I wake up I feel sorry for him and approach the terrarium. Here he is, apparently immobile. I apologize for my behavior in the dream. I promise him that if he comes back to visit me, I won't prevent him from getting out of the terrarium. Some days later he comes back and he is free. He is on a wall with another tarantula. I am happy to see him. In the dream we are in a loft that is falling apart. I am contemplating the idea of moving in.

Catharsis

The sound of the drum is piercing my ears I can't have enough of it please never stop this music this dance is *Ahii*! mamma where are you? *ahii*! please help me carry me over there the water where is the
drum the drum take me closer to the drum ohi…

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my head is going to explode my heart is going to explode my eyes are going to explode my ears are going to

la la la la la la la la

what are these people looking at?

I am falling

my hips is the beat of no one can tell me now I have the right to scream now no one now no listen to

ascolta no

no one no

la la la la la la la

I am free

La la la la la la la la

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Death

When Spirit approached his last molt, he began spinning a web near the water plate. I could tell from the movement of his abdomen, an archaic and wise pattern of his weaving. I left for NYC on a Monday to go teach a tarantella to a group of actors. When I came back, Death was already hanging on the living room, her womb on Spirit's terrarium. I could smell her everywhere. It took me two days to accept that he was dead. Then I prepared some ritual objects and brought the terrarium downstairs. I wanted to give Spirit a sacred burial. When I was four or so, I spent hours doing precessions and ceremonies for dead insects and spiders. I somehow knew how to do it. I took him out of the terrarium, establishing a direct physical contact with him for the first time in six months. I laid him on the ground, in a hole. I covered him. That's when I cried. Chants and ritual gestures followed. After a while I saw his

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shadow rise from the ground, spiraling upwards. He was light and happy. After floating above my head for a while, he headed southward and floated away (to Costa Rica, I believe, where he was originally from). When I went back to the apartment, the living room was shining with light, immersed in a comforting feeling of peace and calm.

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